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OBSTACLES TO THE DIFFUSION OF UNITARIANISM,

AND THE

PROSPECT OF THEIR REMOVAL:

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE SUPPORTERS

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 7, 1827.

BY

JOHN KENRICK, M. A.

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AT CERTE CREDEMUR AIT.

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A SERMON.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 7:

"HE WHO NOW HINDERETH WILL HINDER, UNTIL HE BE TAKEN OUT OF THE WAY."

FEW passages of Scripture have given rise to greater variety of interpretations, than that from which these words are taken. By the generality of Protestant commentators it has been and is still considered, as a prophecy of the corruptions of the Church of Rome; some, however, not confining it to that church, but including in it all which have upheld an unscriptural creed by means inconsistent with the true spirit of the Gospel. Such an application the Roman Catholic commentators of course strenuously resist; and even among Protestants there have not been wanting those who have referred the apostle's words to much nearer events,—to the Gnostic corruptions of the Gospel, or the false teachers who deluded the Jews into those insurrections against the Roman power, which ended in the destruction of their temple and nation. But it is unnecessary that I should inquire which or whether any of these interpretations agrees with the apostle's

meaning, as I confess that it is my intention to use his words only as implying this general truth respecting the counsels of God, that their developement is retarded by obstacles which, for wise purposes, he permits to exist: and I shall proceed to apply this truth to the purpose for which we have this day assembled, by pointing out some of those circumstances which retard the progress of Unitarianism, along with the grounds of hope for their removal.

On such occasions as the present, it has been more usual to illustrate some of the scriptural evidences which justify the peculiarities of our faith, or to shew its practical tendencies, or to repel the unfair attacks to which it has been exposed; and from this custom has arisen a series of powerful defences of our principles, which have scarcely left any thing new to be offered. I have, therefore, preferred to call your attention to circumstances affecting the diffusion of those principles which, as I firmly believe, are independent of their evidence, and which will remain in a great degree unchanged, though men mighty in the Scriptures open and allege from them, that our simple creed is truly that which was once delivered to the saints, and eloquent men adorn the structure which has been raised on the sure foundation of the word of God. Had we met together, only to produce the temporary excitement of a factitious enthusiasm, to give ourselves a confidence which sober judgment does not warrant, and to impose on others by the expression of that confi-

dence, I should abstain altogether from the mention of difficulties to be encountered; but such I am convinced is not the purpose of our assembling. It is true we hope for that excitement of our zeal, which is kindled by the sympathy of men united for the attainment of an object which they agree to think just and great; we look for that increase of confidence which is the natural result of perceiving, that many hearts are interested in the same cause with our own, many minds intent on its promotion, many and various endowments devoted to its attainment. And by cherishing these sentiments in connexion with a solemn act of religious worship, we desire to remind ourselves, that the glory of God is the great object which we ought to seek, his power and blessing that on which we should rely; and to breathe the spirit of Christian love and charity over the avowal of those sentiments which necessarily place us in opposition to so many of our Christian brethren. These are our purposes, and they will best be promoted by considering the relation in which our religious tenets place us to the opinions, feelings, and interests, of the rest of the world, in all its bearings, whether favourable or unfavourable, both that we may fully understand what is demanded of us, and may form that rational estimate of the probability of success, which is the best preservative against fickleness and desertion. The apostle did not conceal from his Ephesian converts, that it was not only with flesh and blood that they must wres-

tle, but "against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;" but frankly acknowledging this, used it as a motive with them "to take unto them the whole armour of God." Had the Corinthians not already known what was their calling, he would have told them, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called;" but he would also have assured them, "that the weak things of the world had been chosen, in the purposes of God, to confound the things that were mighty, and the things that were despised and were not, to bring to nought the things that were." It is our true wisdom, then, not to close our eyes against difficulties, but to compare the value of the object with the exertions necessary for its attainment. The zeal which is fed from some superficial source, is like the brook of the desert, irregular and useless; at one time foaming in idle fury beyond its bounds, at another dried up and consumed out of its place; bringing little honour or benefit to our cause while it lasts, and yet when it decays or ceases, used as an argument against us, as though there were nothing in our principles which could inspire a more permanent attachment. We acknowledge that the age of miraculous conversions is past, we look for no supernatural interpositions of Providence, but only for the blessing of God, bestowed through the ordinary channels of its dispensation, on the faithful and

zealous use of human means; our only rational motive, therefore, for engaging singly or in union in attempts to diffuse our own opinions, is the conviction that benevolence requires us to bear our testimony against pernicious error, and that the difficulties of the undertaking, though great, are not insurmountable.

I. First, then, among the things that hinder and will hinder, until taken out of the way, I reckon the reluctance of mankind to undergo any extensive change in their opinions, and most of all in their religious opinions. If we suppose that a state of society existed widely different, it must be confessed from that in which we live, in which men's interests were not involved in their opinions, by institutions which make them a qualification or disqualification for the enjoyment of worldly advantages, and that in such a society a small body of men arose, endeavouring to convince their fellow-countrymen that their opinions, however sanctioned by length of tradition, however firmly rooted in their minds, are destitute of foundation, would they be heard with patience, and their arguments be calmly refuted or candidly admitted? Certainly not, while human nature remains what it is. Pride and self-love take fire at the insinuation, that others have discovered what we have overlooked; the assailant of established opinions, with whatever meekness and caution he may proceed, must appear to assume the office of a teacher to those whom he

endeavours to convince; and none who have been accustomed to regard themselves as oracles of truth, can easily be persuaded to quit the chair of intellectual authority, and sit at the feet of those whom they have hitherto considered as their disciples. Of all dominion, that which is exercised over the mind of others, seems most to flatter the pride of power, which is inherent in the breast of man. To possess empire over the spiritual realms of thought, to bind the subtle powers of the understanding in the chains of implicit belief, seems to place him on an almost super-human elevation above his fellows. The exercise of this dominion begets the belief of a right, and resistance of course is regarded as rebellion. Truths of science, as well as of religion, truths the most remote from action, as well as those which are most immediately connected with the conduct and the interests of men, have experienced the most violent hostility as long as they were innovations: this temper has shewn itself under all forms of government, (for the popular mind is not at all more patient of contradiction than that of a single tyrant,) and has tinctured almost every dispute respecting opinions, with an infusion of needless and unbecoming bitterness. Under the influence of this temper, men close their eyes to the light, because it is new and they love the ancient darkness better; and thus generations may pass away between the time when truth is exhibited with the evidence of demonstration and that at which it takes its un-

disputed place in the great system of human knowledge.

An important change of opinion is as displeasing to indolence as it is to pride; it obliges men to rouse themselves for their defence; to resist is troublesome, though it should be successful, and the more troublesome, the longer the interval during which their peace has been unbroken and their slumber profound. Such are the feelings which every one excites, who stands forth as the champion of opinions inconsistent with those which mankind have so long received, that they have become, by familiarity, a part of their intellectual and moral being. But the reformer in religion must expect that the storm of ill-will will fall with double fury on his head. It should seem as if religious faith, being conversant with things not sensible but unseen, not possessed but hoped for, required that its vividness should be cherished by the sympathetic feeling and accordant faith of other men, and hence has arisen, in part, that peculiar asperity which has given a disgraceful pre-eminence to the rancour of *theological* controversy. It is doubtless for wise purposes, that a quick sensibility to any attack on our religious principles has been implanted in our frame; as they are the issues of our spiritual life, it was fit that, like the organs which perform the most essential of our vital functions, they should be guarded from destruction by a quick perception of any threatening injury. The salutary operation of

this law is designed to prevent us from making a light and hasty change; in its excess it is one of the most powerful obstacles with which they have to contend, who endeavour to convince others of error in their religious creed.

That those who think our opinions false as well as new, should throw every possible hindrance in the way of their diffusion, was perfectly natural, but it was less to be expected that men should be found who, not denying their truth, should object to their zealous promulgation, on the ground that, from their novelty, they will excite angry hostility, destructive of the peace of society and injurious to Christian charity; or wish that at least we should proceed with the greatest caution, and only gradually disclose the whole extent of our opposition to general opinion. As far as this is meant to enforce on every one, who takes part in religious controversy, the duty of joining the wisdom of the serpent with the meekness of the dove, promulgating as truths only well-weighed opinions, propounding them in a humble sense of his own fallibility, and abstaining from every thing that can excite unnecessary prejudice, who that loves the truth in sincerity would not adopt the advice? But if it be meant that we are to keep back what, after the best examination, we are convinced is both true and important, because it will meet with violent opposition in the actual state of opinion, I must protest against the advice as founded on erroneous principles, and leading to a reserve and

dissimulation which pass by too ready a transition into positive hypocrisy. To the much extolled maxim, "that if the wise man have his hand full of truth he will only open his little finger," I will venture to oppose, as more worthy of being a Christian's rule, the declaration of the apostle who, though he began by teaching his converts only the first principles of the oracles of God, when bidding farewell to those who should see his face no more, could take them to record, "that he had not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God." Acts xx. 27. The solitary truth allowed to escape from the hand would probably be more mischievous, than if it had gone forth in its natural union with other truths. Let us not be misled by false analogies, and change the exception into the rule. The stomach, enfeebled by disease or want of food, cannot safely receive what would not burthen the healthy organ; the eye, unaccustomed to the light, might be blinded by too sudden an irradiation; and the analogy is so far applicable to the mind, that it may be wise partially to communicate the truth to those who are not prepared to receive the whole truth. But does this authorize any man to consider the whole generation of his contemporaries as a vast infirmary of sickly minds, to whom the food of knowledge and the light of truth are only to be dealt in the minutest portions? It is a part of the plan of Providence for the education of the human race, that their attainment of truth should be progressive;

but what mortal is placed so high in intellect above his fellow-creatures, that he is to be the judge what the rate of that progress should be? The probability is, that wherever there is one mind capable of discovering the truth, there are many capable of receiving it; and if there should be many more to hinder than to aid its diffusion, still the sooner it is made known, the sooner it will triumph. "Let then him that hath the word of the Lord declare his word faithfully." Should, after all, the honest, humble, diligent seeker after truth be the involuntary means of diffusing error, let him not fear that a righteous judge will impute it to him as a crime, more than if, intending to bring an offering to the sanctuary, he had unwittingly cast a counterfeited shekel into the treasury of God.

II. If the feelings of men are so strongly repugnant to every attempt at innovation in religious opinion, what a formidable array of opposition must be expected from their interests! This implication of interests with opinions, which forms so great a hindrance to the diffusion of a doctrine which, like Unitarianism, tends to remove the foundation of every popular system, arises partly from circumstances which belong to all opinions deeply rooted in the general belief, but still more from the political and religious institutions of our country. "How," might some one ask in his simplicity, who knew Christianity only in the Scriptures, "how can religion, the objects of which are things spiritual and

eternal, be so mingled with the petty interests and sordid passions of this world, as to bias men in their judgment, or tempt them to insincerity in their profession?" Alas! it has been the fate of religious opinions more than any other to be mixed with temporal interests. It is in religion alone, that a certain set of doctrines which the wisdom of some distant age has pronounced true, are protected from innovation by the united influence of rewards for those who profess and punishment for those who impugn them. The institutions of every Christian country, and not least our own, seem to have been framed under the conviction, that nothing was so much to be dreaded, as that the mind should be left to its own decisions in respect to religious doctrine. Wherever opinions are made the test and qualification for the enjoyment of worldly honours and emoluments, wherever there is a *church* (using the word in its secular, not its scriptural sense) which can reward conformity to its creed and punish dissent from it, it matters not whether by fire, by penalties, or by disabilities, there every other system must contend for acceptance at a manifest disadvantage. The possessors of the emoluments and honours which are thus exclusively bestowed, and all their expectants, whether in near and reasonable prospect or only in the airy visions of ambition, unite in firm phalanx against the innovator. Nor does the injury to the cause of truth rest here. He who by belonging to this favoured and exclusive community

has been exalted in the eyes of the world and in his own estimation, can scarcely bring himself to think of those who differ from him, as deserving respect for the exercise of the most sacred privileges of rational beings and Christians; or to meet them, as man should meet his fellow-men, in the equal field of scripture and argument. Placed on the vantage-ground of an established creed, he considers every dissident as an arrogant and presumptuous man, too proud to submit his faith to lawful authority; for patient reasoning he is apt to substitute railing accusation, to upbraid him with the sin of schism and threaten him with the penalties of heresy.

Does not such a state of things offer the greatest hindrance to the free course of truth? There is no want of candour in the imputation, that many are led by it to profess what they do not believe, that many more are insensibly biassed and inclined to admit arguments as valid, in support of the popular creed, the futility of which they would otherwise readily discern, and that it diffuses, through a still wider circle, a spirit of aversion and hostility to all by whom the prevalence of established opinion is endangered. In no other country is this result seen so strongly and extensively as in our own. In the Roman Catholic kingdoms of Europe, the predominant religion either kills the seed of all varieties of religious opinion, or allows them only a sickly existence beneath its wide-spreading and noxious shade. In other Protestant countries again, the

established creed is either flexible enough to allow of great latitude of belief, or the advantages enjoyed by one religious party above another are so small, that men's passions are not violently engaged in the struggle to appropriate them. The apple of discord is not of gold, and therefore excites no deadly animosities. But in our own country, while the church is so amply endowed both with wealth and power, that her offices are the object of ambition, the truth of her doctrines is open to the freest discussion, and a great change of public opinion on this point could hardly fail to endanger the continued possession of her revenues and honours. The apprehension with which her members view such a change invigorates their resistance and embitters their animosity against all who attack the articles of their church. This cause, it may be said, operates equally against all Dissenters, and is no peculiar hindrance to the growth of Unitarian principles. But against what other body of Dissenters do the ministers of the established church express such unmitigated hostility, against what others do they exert so zealously every influence which they are allowed to use, in order, if possible, to blot our very name from the list of religious professors? Is it so long since we were forbidden by law to avow, much more to propagate, our opinions? Nay, are we at this moment sure, that one edge of the sword of persecution, which we had hoped was for ever blunted and broken, does not remain as sharp as

ever?* Can it be believed that those who avow their regret at the repeal of persecuting statutes, do not use every method which wealth, name, station, and influence, may give them, to check the growth of this which they deem, and with justice as regards themselves, the most dangerous of all varieties of heresy? Strong minds may not be impressed by the constant repetition of feeble arguments and groundless accusations; and generous minds may feel that the violence of a numerous and powerful body is a motive for siding with the smaller and weaker party; but men in general are not so constituted. They catch the tone of the rich, the noble, and the learned, and readily believe all evil of those against whom so much is said. The prejudice thus excited against us, and which no arts are spared to keep alive, spreads far and wide through society, and makes it impossible for the advocates of Unitarianism to obtain, I will not say merely a *fair* hearing, but from large classes of their countrymen any hearing at all.

III. Another circumstance which hinders, and will hinder till it be taken out of the way, is the very general prevalence of the opinion, that the free exercise of the understanding upon religious subjects is dangerous, everlasting salvation depending on faith in certain tenets, which we may thus be led to re-

* See the suggestion of Lord Chancellor Eldon respecting the common-law penalties for denying the Trinity, Mon. Repos. O. S. Vol. XII. pp. 436–438.

nounce. This opinion, deduced from misapprehension of the language of Scripture, has been perpetuated with the greatest care by the leaders of every church as the very charter of their spiritual power. The Romish church has led the way, and maintains inflexibly to this hour, that there is no salvation but in communion with herself, the authorized interpreter of Scripture, to whom the promise of an infallible judgment in religious doctrine was given by Christ, and is confirmed by miracles wrought in each successive age to renew the ratification of the promise. Every Protestant church has kept to the doctrine of the Romish on this subject, as closely as it was possible to do, in any consistency with their open separation from her; and though, when pressed in debate, it may come out, that the infallible church, beyond whose pale no salvation is to be found, is in their sense only that spiritual community which is composed of all true believers in Christ, this truism is kept carefully out of sight, except in such emergencies of argument. Their ordinary language and conduct are framed upon the assumption, that *they* are the true believers, in whose communion alone is safety; and when they have had the power, they have seldom shewn themselves deficient in inclination, to keep men by constraint within their fold, or bring them back to it by violence. If others have established a distinction between those *essential* articles of faith which cannot be rejected without perdition, and the *non-essentials* on which men may

safely differ, we at least gain little by the relaxation for I know of no church which does not regard as essentials those very articles which our name implies that we reject. If others again (for the doctrine is at once so fearful and so absurd that its very advocates are glad to escape from it) profess, that they hold the sentence of damnation to have been pronounced only against those who reject certain doctrines from corrupt motives, even this concession avails us little; for how rarely do we meet with an opponent who does not think himself authorized to conclude, that if we were honest we must agree with him! Even those who in their hearts renounce the doctrine that salvation depends upon the reception of peculiar opinions, yet, from habit or compulsion of their office, continue to hold the high-sounding and terrific language which has been framed upon this supposition; and the many, over whom words and phrases exercise a kind of magic power, shrink back within the circle by which their spiritual rulers have circumscribed them, lest, by stepping beyond it, they should bring on themselves the denunciations which are so often rung in their ears. Of this weapon, none, I think, make a more unsparing use, than those who, dissenting like ourselves from the discipline and ritual of Episcopacy, carry their doctrinal system still further than the established church herself. There is something imposing in *her* voice when she tells us what we may or may not believe consistently with salvation: her anti-

quity, her outward splendour, her temporal power, the learning and station of her ministers, all dispose the mind to submission; and she speaks with the more calmness, because she feels that she speaks with authority. But the ministers of dissenting churches can give no such weight to their anathemas, and in order to guard their communities from the incursions of heresy, they are obliged to make up what they want in dignity and power by vigilant inquisition and acrimonious invective. They warn those over whom they have influence to flee from the contagion of Unitarian principles; to resist, as the undoubted suggestion of the great enemy of man, the first inclination to read or hear what we can offer in our defence, unless with the firmest resolution that it shall only strengthen them in their present faith. The consequence is, that a large proportion of our Christian brethren know nothing more definite of our creed, than that it is the sure perdition of every one who embraces it.

Were I called upon to say which of all the corruptions of Christianity had been most injurious to mankind, I should not point to the long oblivion of the unity of God, nor to the mysterious hypotheses respecting the origin, being, and person of the Saviour; no—nor even to that doctrine which teaches, that the Father of all was induced to remit his wrath against his feeble children, by the suffering and satisfaction of another Infinite Being; not even this appears to me so baneful in its tendency, as the

doctrine once held by every community of Christians, that there is no salvation but in believing what each declares to be the doctrine of the Scriptures. From the Bishop of Rome, in the plenitude of infallibility, through the long gradation of spiritual power, to him who thinks heaven but a colony from his own little church on earth, this opinion has been the parent of every unholy disposition and evil work. The lawfulness and even duty of persecution, in order that the soul might be saved by the suffering of the body, was one of its simplest corollaries; the permanent existence of an authorized and infallible interpreter of Scripture is the only supposition by which it can be reconciled, even in appearance, with the benevolence and justice of God. It has poisoned the springs of the charities of life, by leading men to regard each other as condemned of heaven, for speculative and trifling differences of religious opinion; it has perverted and confounded their moral notions by setting up a fanciful and arbitrary standard of virtue, in orthodoxy of belief, instead of the simple, practical and scriptural test of "doing justice, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with God." We, my brethren, renounce and abjure the doctrine, that man can forfeit his hope of everlasting happiness by any speculative opinion which he has honestly embraced, while he thus conforms to what the Lord his God requires of him. We know that we too might work on the terrors of mankind, by representing our tenets

as essential to salvation; we know that we sacrifice some of the most necessary elements of a religious party, by representing the gospel as comprehensive rather than exclusive; but sooner shall our cause sink as low as its bitterest enemy could desire, than we will appeal to the bad passions of the human heart in its support, and bring dishonour on the gospel and its author. If our zeal cannot be kept alive by philanthropy and Christian love, let it be extinguished! We will never kindle it with fire borrowed from unhallowed altars. Religious faith is the conviction produced by evidence offered on subjects of religion; and surely the world must ere long agree, that as evidence cannot operate on all minds alike, we are not criminal, far less liable to everlasting perdition, for judging differently from others respecting the language of Scripture.

IV. I will only advert to one other hindrance with which Unitarianism has to contend, and that is, the prevalent opinion that it leads to infidelity. In regard to not a few of our fellow-christians, I believe that this cause will be found to resolve itself into the last; for Christianity is in their minds so identified with orthodoxy, that without the latter as there can be no salvation, so there can be no true faith. To relinquish what they call the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, is with them the same thing as to relinquish the gospel itself. If no articles remain in the creed but these, "that there is one God the Father, of whom are all things and we in him;

and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things and we by him, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption, who has brought life and immortality to light, and by whom God will one day judge the world in righteousness, rendering to every man according to his deeds:" if this be what you mean by the gospel, it is in their view little else or little better than infidelity. To such judges we can only reply, "If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's." Others, better able to discern the things that differ, and not confounding Unitarianism with unbelief, regard it as only a stage or halting-place in the progress thither. They allege that the fact corresponds with the natural tendency of our principles, which by exalting reason necessarily leads us to slight the authority of Scripture. To this often-repeated charge of making reason the standard by which to judge what revelation teaches, we can only reply, that neither in ancient nor in modern times have we adopted any such principles of interpretation, and that the office which we assign to reason is the same as others have allotted to her, without any impeachment of their reverence for divine revelation.* As

* "Illam duntaxat scripturarum interpretationem pro orthodoxa et genuina agnoscimus, quæ ex ipsis est petita scripturis *(ex ingenio utique ejus linguæ in qua sunt scriptæ, secundum circumstantias item expensæ, et pro ratione locorum vel similium vel dissimilium, pluriam*

to the question of fact, it is surely not fair to infer any tendency in Unitarianism to produce infidelity, because many who once were orthodox, having detached themselves from the faith in which they were brought up, went on to deny Christianity altogether, as the rock once loosened from its place continues to roll on, long after it has reached the plain. That among those whose faith has from the first been built on Unitarian principles, any greater tendency to unbelief has shewn itself than among the professors of other religious systems, is altogether an unfounded assertion ; and this is the only fair criterion. In what other religious community are greater pains taken to make the young able to give a reason of the hope that is in them ? While in other societies they learn to lisp and repeat by rote mysterious dogmas respecting the Godhead, or in unmeaning hyperboles to accuse themselves of a radical depra-

quoque et clariorum, expositæ) cum regula fidei et charitatis congruit, et ad gloriam Dei hominumque salutem eximie facit." Confess. Helv. II., quoted in Winer's *Comparative Darstellung des Lehrbegriffs*, 1824. He observes, (p. 17,) that it was set forth by the preachers of Zurich, in 1566, and afterwards approved by all the Reformed cantons and the churches of Geneva, Savoy, Poland, Hungary, and Scotland. The addition "cum regula fidei," &c., is a proof of that timidity and inconsistency on the part of Protestants in the application of their own principle, which affords the Catholics a natural ground of triumph. For what is this *rule of faith ?* If derived from Scripture, then it cannot surely ascertain the sense of Scripture; if from some other source, what then becomes of the Protestant doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture? There are, in fact, few Protestant churches which do not practically make their Articles, Catechism, or Liturgy, the *regula fidei* by which the Bible is to be interpreted.

vity of nature and inability for every good work, with us they are carefully taught the simple and intelligible evidence, "that Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God by miracles, signs, and wonders, which God did by him." Does the imputation ground itself upon any backwardness which Unitarians have shewn to defend the Gospel from the attacks of unbelievers? Our communion has furnished much more than its proportion of advocates for the truth of Christianity, and it is not a little remarkable that those who have been most successful in this work, from Grotius and Locke, to Paley* and Watson, have either shewn a close conformity with our creed, or have laboured under the suspicion of a wide departure from the standard of orthodoxy. At the present moment we hear comparatively little of unbelief among the lower classes of society: where it does exist, I know that the preachers of Unitarianism are among its most active and successful opponents, in meekness of wisdom regaining those whom harsh and damnatory denunciations would have alienated for ever from the Gospel, and preserving others for a rational faith, whose understandings had revolted against what had been taught them as Christianity. The disposition to renounce and revile religion, which shewed itself a few years back, was, I am persuaded, chiefly the

* If Paley, when he wrote on the Evidences of Christianity, really entertained the sentiments which appear in his Discourses, he has been very careful not to embarrass himself with the defence of them.

effect of resentment against a church whose kingdom is of this world, and which lends itself too readily to the harsh measures of the ruling powers not to share in their odium. It has in great measure disappeared as gratitude and confidence have succeeded to irritation and distrust in the feelings of the people towards their governors; but, should this or any other cause produce a similar state of the public mind, I doubt not that Unitarian preachers and writers will approve themselves as zealous in defence of their faith, as when Lardner vindicated the character of Jesus against the vulgar calumnies of Woolston, or Priestley maintained the reasonableness and authority of Revelation against the subtle philosophy of the eighteenth century.

I might mention other things which "hinder and will hinder till they be taken out of the way," but I have said enough to shew, as I proposed, that, wholly independent of the truth or falsehood of our opinions, there exist obstacles to their diffusion, deeply seated in the institutions of our country, and in the feelings and views of our fellow-countrymen. That they are embraced under all these obstacles by many by whom they are not openly avowed, cannot admit a doubt: it must be confirmed by every one who converses much with mankind. Many think with us, who deem the matter not of sufficient moment to be worth the obloquy which the profession of our creed entails; many, whose temporal interests would suffer by withdrawing from the na-

tional church; many, who imagine that, as the national church, it claims support like other institutions of their country, whether they agree with its doctrines or not; many, who fear to be thought infidels, if known to be Unitarians. The knowledge that such obstacles exist to the increase of our numbers, shews us that we should not look to numbers as a criterion, nor suppose that we gain no ground unless we can rival other sects in reports of conversions; we should rather fix our attention on those gradual and therefore sure revolutions in sentiment, which remove ancient prejudices, or prepare the way for their removal. Such changes an attentive observer may discover. Even if the extraordinary intellectual activity of the present day did not bear directly on religion, it could not continue without producing an effect upon religion. In the great circle of human knowledge every radiant point sheds its light on all the rest. However some may reject the idea of a progressive religion, nothing is more certain than that it must receive modifications from the intellectual state of the world. Though kindled from heaven, the brightness of its flame depends on the purity of the atmosphere in which it burns. Creeds may remain unchanged, while the faith of their nominal adherents no more resembles that of their framers, than the race that now tills the banks of the Nile resembles those who are embalmed in the Egyptian catacombs. Among a people who use their understanding freely on all other sub-

jects, blind reverence for the opinions and institutions of antiquity, which is one great support of orthodoxy, must give place to the determination to try every thing on its own evidence, and by its own merits. This exercise of the reason must be favourable to the system which can without reserve or evasion endure its application. For though we disclaim, as I have already said, the imputation of first determining what is rational, and by that test what has been revealed, we do rejoice herein and will rejoice, that, as the result of our scriptural research, reason and revelation do not appear at variance. We are convinced that no doctrines can ultimately prevail among a people allowed to think and examine for themselves, which, like Transubstantiation, involve a sensible absurdity, or, like the Trinity, a metaphysical contradiction, or, like the doctrine of Atonement in its genuine form, are utterly repugnant to what nature shews and reason proves of the moral attributes of God. The surrender of their understandings is a price which men will not long consent to pay for the belief of any system of theology.

The same general activity and independence of thought tends to the immediate mitigation, and ultimate though distant removal, of the obstacle which arises from the *establishment* of the Trinitarian and Calvinistic doctrines. Except among the clergy themselves, and those whose minds have been completely moulded by them, the notion of any other

right in the church than what the state confers upon her, is fast wearing away. It will probably yet be long before even Protestant Europe will be convinced of the iniquity and mischief of establishing one form of Christianity, to the exclusion of all others; but there are countries whose laws have been framed in freedom from that overbearing influence which the church possessed, when the constitutions of almost all our states were formed; and from America Europe may one day learn how much the task of government will be simplified, the peace of society promoted, and the dignity and purity of religion itself enhanced, by taking away from the church the power which engenders pride and provokes animosity, and the wealth which is a lure to worldly ambition, a temptation to indolence and to dishonest conformity. In the mean time, let the example of America teach us what is the natural tendency of Unitarian Christianity to rapid diffusion, when those hindrances are taken out of the way which obstruct its progress here.

But it is a still stronger ground of hope, that the intellectual activity of the present day is directed in no small degree to the subject of religion, and that the study of the Scriptures begins to obtain amongst us much more attention than it has hitherto enjoyed. To misapprehension of the language of Scripture, I attribute by far the greater part of the existing corruptions of Christianity, in producing which, I see no reason to assign any conside-

rable share to bad motives.* That their authors should have erroneously supposed that they had the warrant of Scripture for their respective systems, will not appear incredible, when we consider how rapid was the decline of knowledge in the ages which immediately followed the propagation of the gospel, to what a depth of barbarous ignorance the world had sunk before the edifice of Anti-christian doctrine was completed, and how widely different were the language, manners, and opinions of the nations which formed the bulk of the Christian church, from those of that Eastern people by whom the books of the New Testament were written. The results of these misconceptions have been propagated downwards to the present hour, in the popular creeds; and the patient study of many generations of learned men has been necessary, to enable us to enter fully into the circumstances under which the authors of the New Testament wrote, and the influences thus exerted upon their phraseology. We may hope, therefore, that the increased attention to biblical study, which, from the example of neighbouring nations, appears to be communicating itself to our own, will powerfully advance our cause. Doubtless the adherents of other opinions will say, that they feel a similar con-

* I speak of speculative doctrines; for many practices and institutions appear to have been engrafted, from selfish motives, on the simplicity of the Gospel.

fidence, but that they have an equal ground for it I shall not admit, until some country is pointed out to me, in which the study of the Bible has been zealously pursued with all the aids of modern erudition, and the result has been to strengthen men's belief in those doctrines against which we contend. I may ask without vain glory, by what other body of Christians has the precept to search the Scriptures ever been more unreservedly obeyed? We seek no leave from priest or pontiff to read them for ourselves; we are not mocked by the permission to judge of their doctrines, coupled with an injunction to interpret them in conformity with articles and catechisms. We put the sacred volume into the hands of those who are to be our future ministers in holy things, that they may use their own judgment on its contents, and call them to no account for the result of their examination. The difference between ourselves and other religious bodies in these respects, might enable an impartial observer to determine which side feared, and which invited, the application of the test of Scripture to its creed.

Whatever cause there may be to regret the circumstances which at this moment have raised such a tempest of religious controversy between the members of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches, I cannot but regard it as appointed by Providence for the benefit of both, and ultimately as the means of opening their minds to the recep-

tion of a more scriptural faith. We have been told by the acutest champion of Popery in our own times, that Unitarians are of all Protestants the most consistent, and carry the principles of the Reformation to their fullest extent;* and in this declaration, though intended by its author as the bitterest taunt, we acknowledge a truth, while we despise the sneer. The orthodox Protestant, who has come to the contest, expecting an easy triumph over the Catholic, by proving to him how little of his creed is found in Scripture, will be staggered when the Catholic proves to him in his turn, how little of his own can be derived from it. He will find that he can escape from the admission of transubstantiation, only by that plea of figurative language which the Unitarian takes up to prove that a great deal of the popular theology is built on figures of speech, never designed by those who used them to be taken in a literal sense. And thus He whose prerogative it is to bring good out of evil, and cause the wrath of man to praise him, may design to overrule the angry passions which an unjust policy has engendered, to the accomplishment of a great moral and intellectual change, which could not have been effected by gentler means.

But while the slow course of events is thus removing hindrances to the reception of pure

* Lingard, Tracts, (1826,) pp. 42, 132.

Christianity, we ought to endeavour to be workers together with God, by employing our most zealous exertions for the same end. For though we can do nothing against the truth, we may do much for the truth. Where the work is vast and the labourers are few, not only energy, but combination is necessary, and the existence of that ASSOCIATION, to the promotion of whose objects this day's services are more especially devoted, proves that Unitarians are fully sensible of the importance of union and co-operation in the diffusion of their principles. Although of recent origin in its present form, it claims your confidence and support, by appealing to the effects which, under a different name, it had produced in the previous twenty years of its existence. It avails itself of every method of presenting the principles of Unitarianism to public view; it collects the contributions of our wealthier and more flourishing communities, for the support of the feebler and more obscure; it unites us for the defence of those civil and religious privileges which we already enjoy, or the attainment of what is still wanting to the full birthright of British citizens; and it connects in brotherhood, sympathy and mutual aid, our scattered churches, not only in this kingdom, but in distant quarters of the globe.

If, among its various objects, I were to select one peculiarly calculated to remove the hindrances to the adoption of Unitarian principles, and secure

them a firm footing among our countrymen, it would be the promotion of popular instruction, by means of the pulpit and the press. The higher classes have abundant sources of religious information within their reach, and are apt to consider such topics with indifference, or merely in a worldly view; it is among the middle and lower classes that zeal for religious truth, purely as such, will be chiefly found. As it is their activity, industry, and intelligence, which gives its character in these respects to the whole nation, so the religious character of the community is stamped by what they are in doctrine and practice. They follow only at a long interval the real changes of opinion in the powerful and lettered class; they retain the truth most firmly when once possessed, and are most tenacious of error when once thoroughly imbued with it. This was remarkably illustrated in the first ages of the Christian church. While philosophic minds were busied with those subtle speculations respecting the nature of God and the person of Christ, which at last usurped the place of the primitive faith, the "plain and unlettered men" held fast the doctrine of the Divine Unity, and refused to listen to the theories which the learned had devised for reconciling the monarchy of the One God with the deity of two other beings. The case is now changed, and the great task is to produce a conviction of the truth of Uni-

tarianism in the minds of this class of society. So great is their power, that, leaving force out of the question, I am convinced, that even were the ministers of religion generally in favour of one system of doctrine, and the bulk of the people of another, the pastors would be compelled to yield to their flocks, if they were so fettered by the articles and constitution of their church, as not to be able directly to attack those opinions which were deeply rooted in the minds of the common people. I cannot, therefore, think that Unitarianism has obtained a safe and permanent footing in any country till the people at large have been made fully and freely acquainted with its distinct and proper evidence. That apparent acquiescence which results from their pastors' abstaining from all mention of the doctrines of orthodoxy, while the language of their creeds and formularies remains the same, is delusive, and may be succeeded by a rapid and extensive re-action. Happily among ourselves there is no such concealment, and therefore, if we increase more slowly and encounter more opposition, we are more certain of the ground which we gain. Those who devote themselves to this particular walk of instruction, will be esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake, by all who wish our cause to prosper. They are laying a deep and solid foundation, and their labour, though less conspicuous than that of others, is equally essential to the stability of

the building, which, fitly framed together, "groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord."

What then remains, but that I exhort you in the words of the same apostle, "Brethren be not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not"? If it were necessary for St. Paul twice to enforce this caution,* it will hardly be found superfluous by those who are engaged in an undertaking of which the fruits are necessarily in some measure distant. We are apt to consider these things rather with reference to the span of time which our earthly being occupies, than to the infinite duration of God and the vast extent of the counsels of his Providence. We cast the seed into the ground, and forthwith expect the harvest; but the great year of the Divine government is not divided by our signs and seasons; it stretches backward and forward into the depth of unknown ages. We believe that the cause in which we are engaged, being the cause of truth, virtue, and pure religion, must be successful, according to the just and wise dispensations of God; we know that already it has triumphed, and is going on to conquer; but the period is far distant, probably, when every thing that hindereth shall be taken out of the way. Let us not, then, abandon the good work in which we have engaged, disheartened because the pace of

* Gal. vi. 9; 2 Thess. iii. 13.

human improvement is so different from the lightning speed of our wishes and imaginations, far less in petulant discontent, because our labour is ill-requited and obscure. Let us rather "lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees," and, having cheerfully and zealously discharged our part as advocates of the truth, leave the times and the seasons of its final establishment to Him, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. Amen.

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A SERMON,

&c.

THE FALSE ACCUSERS OF THE BRETHREN REPROVED,

AND

THE ACCUSED INSTRUCTED HOW TO REPLY :

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE SUPPORTERS

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

MAY 28th, 1828.

BY

JOSEPH HUTTON, LL.D.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. *Matt.* vii. 1.

If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. 2 *Cor.* x. 7.

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1828.

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A SERMON.

1 Cor. iv. 1—5:

Let a man so account of us as of the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: for I am conscious to myself of nothing; yet I am not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

When opposite opinions are maintained upon any subject of importance, there cannot be a doubt that the wisest method would be, for those who maintain them to meet as friends, and discuss calmly and temperately, in the love of truth and of each other, the points on which they differ. They would thus have it in their power to ascertain exactly where the difference lies, and whence it arises; what their respective opinions really are, for this is frequently misunderstood; and upon what basis

of reason they are severally founded; whether the parties are at issue, as it often happens, merely upon the meaning of words, or upon the reality of facts. Especially should we proceed thus when the subject is one of serious importance, on which it is the joint and equal interest of both parties to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. But this mode is little likely to be adopted by those who make opinions the test of principles, and allow themselves to take it for granted that the heart is wrong when the conclusions of the understanding seem to them to be erroneous. It is not probable that we shall meet willingly or converse amicably with persons whom we assume to be wilfully immoral, or that they, knowing themselves to be so regarded, will particularly seek or desire any frank or cordial intercourse with us.

Why the selfish and unprincipled should resort to the plan of traducing the characters of those whose opinions they wish, from whatever motive, to discountenance, may be readily conceived. The love of virtue, they are well aware, is, in a greater or less degree, the inmate of every human breast, and they avail themselves of the general prevalence of this noble principle, exactly as the empiric does of the universal desire of that first of temporal blessings, health, to promote their own base purposes. The love of health, and the love of virtue, all men feel; and for this very reason it is that the enemies of the body and the soul, with remorseless cruelty

and cunning, endeavour to cheat men into the hope of attaining or securing these first objects of their desire by measures calculated, as they themselves well know, to extend the ravages of disease, and to perpetuate the reign of ignorance and vice. The interested opponents of improvement have long since discovered that a strong prejudice may be readily excited, in the minds of the multitude, against any new opinion, in reference more especially to morals and religion, by representing the authors and maintainers of it as immoral characters, whose object it is to deceive or corrupt those who listen to them. This idea accordingly they hesitate not to infuse, whenever they have an opportunity of doing so. They assail by calumny those whom they dare not meet in the fair and equal combat of argument. To malign the teacher is less difficult than to disprove his doctrine, and there is this additional advantage, that multitudes will understand and credit a calumny, by whom an argument would not have been listened to, or could not have been comprehended. "He is a bad man, he wishes to corrupt you; shut your ears and hearts against every thing he has to say;" this is indeed a short and easy method with heretics and unbelievers, which the enemies of truth and virtue often employ to prevent the progress of opinions that they dislike or dread, and by which the well-meaning, but timid and ignorant, are too often persuaded to rest in their ignorance, unenlightened and unimproved.

Nor is this device of frightening fearful virtue into a voluntary deafness to the voice of Truth, of recent discovery; it has been practised with success in every age, and in some cases in which it required a degree of effrontery almost inconceivable to resort to it. Think of Socrates, my friends, that true philosopher and brightest luminary of the heathen world, condemned to death as a corrupter of the young: think of the first followers of Jesus, models of virtue in a vicious age, every where spoken against, not as evil thinkers merely, but as evil doers also; most wonderful of all, think of Jesus himself, of him who was "holy, harmless, and undefiled, in whom there was no sin, neither was guile found in his lips," stigmatized, while living, as a "glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," and finally consigned to the torments of the cross, as a blasphemer of his God. Which of us, indeed, in our own day, has not had frequent occasion to wonder at the effect produced by giving evil names to good men and things?—by stigmatizing emancipators, for instance, as anarchists, friends of the poor as foes of the rich, advocates of religious liberty as patrons of infidelity and indifference, disseminators of the gospel as enemies of social order and disturbers of the peace. Without question, it is a grievous thing that so many should thus suffer themselves to be deceived by mere words, by empty sounds, to their own hurt: there is something, however, to console, and even to cheer us with hope,

in the reflection, that the very success of the deceiver in every such instance is a testimony to the esteem in which virtue is generally held; since it would appear, that to misrepresent truth as the promoter of vice, is found, by the artful and designing, one of the surest methods of preventing its reception and impeding its progress in the world.

It is not, however, I regret to say, by the unprincipled alone that the moral characters of men are stigmatized, on the sole ground of opinions deemed obnoxious, though seriously and conscientiously held, irreproachably acted upon, and charitably professed. Amongst the truly good there are not a few who regard and represent agreement with themselves, on certain topics of doubtful speculation, as essential both to good fame in this world, and salvation in the next,—with whom to dissent from their peculiar creed is to be a person of irreligious and immoral character, an enemy of God, and if entitled to the love of man at all, entitled to it only in the no very enviable form of pity. "He thinks not as I do, therefore he is a bad man," is an argument which even Christians, and Christians, too, in many respects not unworthy of the name, have not been ashamed to use: nor let them object to this representation, on the ground that it is not dissent from their private opinion, but from the revealed will of God, that they regard as the test of criminality, since by the "revealed will of God" they must obviously mean that will as interpreted

by themselves. "He does not agree with me in my view of the truths of revelation,—therefore he is a bad man," may be a somewhat fuller, but does not appear to me to be a much more favourable, statement of their argument.

Were I to attempt to account for the disposition which even the truly pious and virtuous have so frequently manifested to exclude from their good opinion here, and from the hope of happiness hereafter, those whose form of religious faith differs from their own, I might perhaps conjecture, that having attributed, and justly so, all the solid excellence of their own characters, all that within them on which they build their everlasting hopes, to the religious creed that they profess, a creed inclusive of many articles, variously true and variously influential, but inseparably combined in their view by association, they have never ventured to conceive that *any portion* of a faith held so sacred, and found so beneficial, could safely be dispensed with, or regarded as of less intrinsic value or practical importance than the rest. They feel like the individual who, having derived essential benefit from a medicine, compounded of many different ingredients, the separate value and operation of which he has never learned to estimate, naturally dreads the thought of any one of them being omitted, and alarms himself with the idea that, if it were, the sanative influence of the compound would altogether cease. "This medicine has saved my life—this faith

has purified my heart, sanctified my conduct, and saved my soul." No other medicine, no other faith, it is rashly and ignorantly concluded, could have produced the same effect.

The beneficial influence of their own creed, taken as a whole, upon their minds, has appeared, I doubt not, to many good men an experimental and conclusive evidence of its perfect accordance with that revealed will of God, from which they believe every part of it to have been derived. They forget that the really influential articles may, after all, be those which it has in common with other creeds, by which, therefore, the same happy effects may be produced. In estimating the practical influence of their creed upon themselves, they necessarily regard it as a whole; but in examining the creeds of other men, they naturally consider apart the articles of which they consist, and from these, separately taken, infer practical consequences which those who have always been accustomed to view them in combination, and to attend only to their united influence, cannot perceive and will not allow to exist. "The ingredients of this medicine must be excellent," is the natural, though rash, conclusion of one who has materially profited by the mixture: "This compound must be dangerous, if not destructive, since some of the component parts of it are to my certain knowledge poisonous or unwholesome," is the no less hasty decision of one who has had no experience of it as a compound.

"This creed is sound and orthodox throughout," says the dogmatical good man who has lived a holy and happy life under its influence: "It is damnably erroneous," says another, as good, possibly, and as dogmatical, who has confined his view to certain detached articles of it, which he has examined separately, and concluded, perhaps justly, to be of evil tendency, but which, if he had carried his examination farther, he might have found to be neutralized by other articles connected with it.

Happily, there is no Christian creed in which the well-constituted mind will not find the needful food of piety and virtue; and these, once established in the heart, will render all the minor errors and extravagancies of theory comparatively harmless. The goodness of the man, like the tree which Moses cast into the bitter waters of Marah, or the meal which Elisha mingled with the poisonous pottage, will often sweeten the bitterness and neutralize the venom of the creed, and that, too, with so insensible as well as efficient an operation, as to leave the worthy professor altogether unsuspicious of its containing any thing disagreeable or noxious. As the good man frequently imagines that goodness in others which he feels within himself, so would he appear sometimes to invest his creed, by his mode of viewing it, with unreal excellence, his own virtue, like certain optical glasses, supplying the illusive medium through which what to the naked eye of the impartial spectator appears

hideous and deformed, is seen in apparent symmetry and beauty.

The fact, however, is certain—ascribe it to what cause we may, whether to the misinterpretation of particular passages of scripture, a superstitious view of the importance of sectarian peculiarities, or a base and unprincipled policy—that it has been much too common a practice among the followers of Christ, for the professors ofdifferent opinions, in their treatment of each other, to invade the province of the Searcher of hearts, and to set at nought the precept of their common Master, " Judge not, that ye be not judged." Where, alas ! is the sect whose members have not at one time or other degraded their own character, by vilifying the conduct of their opponents, and groundlessly imputing criminality, where the very most that they could attempt to prove was error ?

I presume not to say, my brethren, that the conduct of Unitarians has always been blameless in this respect, or that we could safely venture to throw the first stone against those who have thus offended. There may have been occasions on which members of our body, in the warmth of their opposition to sentiments which they deem erroneous, have failed to manifest the due degree of candour and charity towards the holders of them,—when they have unjustly visited upon the creed the personal conduct of its professors, or upon the professors the disavowed practical consequences of the creed,—when they

have invidiously availed themselves of the private conduct of particular opponents to excite odium against their religious system, or represented that system, without proof, as depraving the characters of those who maintain it. I pretend not to affirm that Unitarians have always been guiltless on this head, or that they have never condescended to calumniate those whom it should have been their object to confute, and if possible convince. Within, as well as without, our little beleaguered fort, the laws of Christian warfare have doubtless too often been transgressed, and carnal weapons have sometimes, I fear, disgraced the hands of our warriors, when they have contended for the truth: yet am I willing and happy to believe that in this respect we have been more sinned against than sinning.

Whatever may have been occasionally thrown out by individuals amongst us, in the heat of controversy, which those who differ from us might justly deem personally hostile, I rejoice to think that we have not as yet been chargeable, so far as my knowledge extends, with any elaborate attempts to traduce the characters of our fellow-christians of other denominations. I rejoice that we have not as yet instituted a formal comparison between their private conduct and our own, with the view of proving that our system must be superior to theirs on the ground—which though a Pharisee might choose, a Christian, in my opinion, should fear to occupy—that we, in our own estimation, are better and holier

than they. I rejoice that we have not yet professed to weigh their errors of judgment, in the "balance of criminality," with those sins which are common to us all; and I rejoice yet more in the certainty that, if we had so weighed them, those errors, serious and important as we conscientiously deem them, would have seemed to us light as vanity in the comparison, and in a single instant would have appeared to kick the beam.

But were it otherwise,—could it be proved that Unitarians had been, and still continued, in the constant habit of maligning those who differed from them, of representing them as wilful perverters of scripture, despisers of God, and haters of Christ, of applying to them, in short, all the calumnious and abusive epithets that the vocabulary of theological odium supplies in such disgraceful abundance, I hope and trust, my brethren, that I should not have been less anxious—yea rather, that I should have felt a still deeper anxiety—to hold up before you the bright example, and to urge upon you the admirable counsel, of the Apostle in our text, who returned not railing for railing, and calumny for calumny, but, while he modestly defended himself, calmly recommended his Corinthian traducers thenceforth to suspend their harsh and hasty decisions upon his character and conduct, and those of other men, and "to judge nothing before the time." Should *we* now or hereafter be justly chargeable with this, or with any other sin, may some faithful and beloved

brother be always at hand, to withstand us, if need be, to the face, and to bring home to our consciences those errors and transgressions of which he can produce evidence that we have been actually guilty; but let us not, in the mean time, be regarded as devoid of gratitude, because we venture to doubt the "sweetness" of that charity which does not scruple to calumniate, while it professes itself anxious to convert us,—or deficient in humility, because we condemn the conduct of those who bring forward accusations against us, of which they not merely *do not*, but *cannot*, produce proofs.

It is notorious, and cannot, I think, be denied by any impartial observer, that, in their controversies with us, our opponents have repeatedly invaded the peculiar province and prerogative of the Searcher of hearts, and, not contented with charging us with aberrations from the truth, have been in the habit of asserting that our aberrations are *wilful;* that we intentionally mutilate, corrupt, and pervert, what we know to be the revealed will of God; that we have neither the fear nor the love of our Heavenly Father ruling in our hearts; and that, though we assume the name of Christ, and call him Lord, and outwardly profess submission to his authority, we only do so to veil our inward and rooted hostility both to him and to his Gospel.

"It is not the simple neglect of the Saviour," says a popular writer, in a little work lately given to the world, intended, as he would represent, to

communicate to young minds just ideas of the nature, tendency, and practical influence of our sentiments, but which in fact contains a series of the grossest misrepresentations,—wilful I call them not, for I hope better things of the author, and even if I had no positive ground of hope, I should not dare to speak, without proof, of him as he has spoken of thousands of whom he could have no personal knowledge—"It is not," says he, "simple neglect of the Saviour we now perceive, but direct hostility. The mere worldling neglects the Redeemer completely, yet he talks, if put to it, respectfully of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Unitarian can scarcely stoop even to such customary politeness towards a personage whom *in his heart* he hates, whose claims he resists, whose honours he prides himself in denying. His aim now is to dethrone the Carpenter's son; by sly insinuation to lower his influence, or by open opposition to disgrace his determined followers. As to disgracing the Saviour himself, it is happily out of their power, for 'He that sitteth in the heaven shall laugh at them, Jehovah shall have them in derision.' Is it possible," he continues, "to suppose that a mind thus acting can be innocent in its motives, its conclusions, its determinations? If our thoughts are known to God, all their operations are known, with every cause of effects so perverse. If he searches the heart, there will he see not only real opposition, but rancorous

ill-will against the Lord, and against his Anointed."*

Doubtless, *if* the feelings which he imputes are there, we need not this writer to tell us that the Lord *will search*, nay more, that He *has searched* them out. But who has told him that they *are* there? Who has made *him* of council with the Omniscient? Who has revealed to him the hatred which we bear in our hearts towards one, whom every genuine Unitarian Christian (I say it with full assurance of faith, with a convinced understanding, and a heart that responds to its convictions) believes to have been utterly incapable of any thought, word, or deed, by which hatred could possibly have been engendered in a rational and virtuous mind,—whose character and conduct every such Christian regards as altogether lovely,—in whom he beholds, with admiring eyes, the only faultless model of humanity that it has pleased the Great Father of us all to exhibit to our race, from the creation of the world up to the present day,—in whom he recognizes, with deep feelings of personal gratitude, the Saviour that lived, and suffered, and died, for him and for all men; the good shepherd that refused not to lay down his life for his sheep; the friend who, by the most costly sacrifice that Friendship has it in her power to offer, proved that his

* See Note in the Appendix.

was indeed "that love than which no man could shew greater,"—in whom, finally, he venerates the best-beloved Son of God, the first-born brother from the grave, whom, for his perfect obedience unto death, the Father hath "highly exalted, and given him a name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*"? Who, I repeat the question, has revealed to this writer the hatred which Unitarian Christians bear to the Lord and Master whom they profess to honour, love, and serve? And if God himself has not revealed it to him, upon what inferior authority could he venture to impute it?

Beloved brethren, let us learn from the full and decisive refutation which the heart of every genuine member of our body must give to the uncharitable judgments of this well-intentioned, perhaps, but ill-informed and most intemperate writer, the miserable folly of erecting ourselves into searchers of hearts, and pretending to judge our brethren as God only—by whom, let us bear in mind, *we* also must be judged—*can* judge them. Whatever others do, let us resolve to abide by the advice of the Apostle, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have his praise of God."

I know not that the true Christian, regarded with a suspicious eye, or assailed with a calumniating tongue, by his fellow-christians, on the ground of his conscientious dissent from their sentiments or practice, could anywhere find better instructions how to feel and act, or a finer model of exculpatory argument, than in St. Paul's reply to his Corinthian calumniators, recorded in the passage which I have chosen for my text.

During a residence of a year and a half at Corinth, the Apostle had preached the gospel there with great success. A flourishing church was established under the happiest auspices. "Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase." For a season we may suppose them to have dwelt in peace, enjoying and improving their new privileges, blessed in their union from above, and mutually blessing each other, according to the beautiful description of the infant church at Jerusalem, "being of one heart and of one soul, continuing daily with one accord in the exercise of social devotion, breaking bread from house to house in memory of their Lord, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people, while the Lord added daily to their church such as should be saved."

For a short period this happy state of things prevailed, and the members of the Corinthian church, enriched with spiritual gifts and graces, and especially possessed of that, without which, the Apostle

was afterwards obliged to remind them, all others are and profit nothing, pursued together the "more excellent way." So long as they enjoyed the personal presence and superintendence of their distinguished founder, and of his zealous and eloquent successor in the work, they would appear to have dwelt in love. But the members of the Corinthian church were men, frail men, and causes, similar to those which have since wrought their evil work, on so much larger a scale, in the church universal, made them too soon acquainted with the mischiefs and miseries of discord.

Soon after the departure of Apollos, disorders and dissensions arose amongst them; they began to contend with each other for power and pre-eminence; and the "more excellent way" was forgotten, while they vehemently disputed about the comparative dignity and value of their spiritual gifts. Even their revered instructors, engaged, as they knew them to be, with one heart and mind in the service of one Master, they would fain have rendered accessary, if they could, to the growth of that spirit of pride and rivalry which had intruded into their church. They were determined to regard them, however unwilling to be so regarded, as the heads of rival parties, and to derive from their various qualifications matter of dispute, rather than means of edification. "I am of Paul," said one, and "I of Apollos," said another, and "I of Cephas," said a third, while all forgot to be of Christ, and proved,

therefore, how falsely they affirmed themselves to be of Cephas, or of Apollos, or of Paul. Amongst those by whom this contentious spirit was fostered in the church of Corinth, would appear to have been a particular individual, not named, but distinctly referred to, who had acquired considerable influence, which he employed to form a party in opposition to Paul, and to alienate, if possible, from their first and most distinguished teacher, the confidence and affections of his converts. The methods which he and his party pursued for the attainment of their object, were such as have been very frequently employed, with the like view, in similar cases. They contrasted the character and conduct of the Apostle unfavourably with those of other distinguished instructors, to whom they evidently wished to represent him as a rival or an enemy ; and they ventured to throw out insinuations against his moral character, and to question the fidelity with which he had discharged the duties of his apostolic office. To their invidious comparisons of others with himself, the Apostle nobly replied, by entirely disclaiming, both on his own behalf and that of his true fellow-labourers in the gospel, even the faintest wish or remotest thought of rivalry, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, were, in his view, all one in Christ,—men labouring with one heart for the attainment of one end,—each bound to discharge his duty, according to the ability and grace conferred upon him, and to look for a blessing upon his exertions, with trustful

piety and unenvying love, to Him who giveth the increase, and from whom every man shall assuredly receive his own reward according to his own labour. "While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour; for we are fellow-labourers under God." "Let a man so account of us," says the Apostle in my text, "as of the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God: moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

Such, my friends, were the generous sentiments of Paul, when he saw, with sorrow, the disposition that prevailed amongst his Corinthian converts to institute comparisons between himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel, and to represent as rivals those whom his better feelings had taught him to regard as brethren and friends. He was not without *his* party in the church of Corinth: on the contrary, we have every reason to believe that there were not a few who advocated his claims to pre-eminence, and whose motto was, "I am of Paul." Nevertheless, he would not join himself to them:

he felt no desire to increase their numbers or their power: he might, doubtless, if he would, have fanned their party zeal into a flame; but, instead of doing so, he laboured to extinguish it: he might, with apparent, at least, if not real truth, have contended for his own decided superiority to those with whom he was compared; but he shrunk back, on the contrary, with evident disgust from the very idea of personal comparison. "Is Christ divided?" he exclaimed. "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" It mattered not to him whether it was the name of Paul or of Apollos that was chosen to supersede the only name by which Christians ought to be called, and to serve as the war-cry of separation and hostility amongst those who ought to be indissolubly united in the bonds of love and allegiance to one common Lord.

Paul does not appear to have been even gratified by the partial and exclusive attachment of his converts. He says nothing in his letter from which we can infer that he thought himself in the least degree honoured by it. He sends no especial greeting to those who had chosen to distinguish themselves as his party, and to say, "I am of Paul." He visits them, on the contrary, with the very same measure of condemnation and reproof with which he visited all those who were for sowing the spirit of contention and rivalry amongst Christ's followers, or for calling any man Master except Christ himself.

He was evidently anxious that his converts should profit by the labours of all their instructors. He rejoiced with joy unfeigned that there was an Apollos to water the vineyard that Paul had planted. Provided the vines sprang up, and the tender grapes shewed themselves, he cared not whether it was by his own or by another's instrumentality. It was the growth of the vineyard, the success of the cause, he had at heart, and where he could not labour personally he prayed with a sincere and fervent spirit, that the Lord of the harvest would raise up other labourers, not less, but, if possible, more efficient than himself. "It matters not," thought he in his own mind, "whether it were I or they, so that we preach and ye believe." "Enviest thou for my sake?" he would have exclaimed with the great lawgiver of Israel. "Would God all the Lord's people were prophets, and that he would put his spirit upon them!" Nay, more, he could rejoice in the furtherance of his Master's cause, even when produced by the agency of those who manifested personal hostility to himself, and the purity of whose motives he was compelled, by his regard to truth, to question. "Some, indeed," says he, in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians, "preach Christ even of envy and strife, and others also of good-will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds, but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Not-

withstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, and will rejoice." Noble-minded man! how far from his mind the narrow spirit that would cry, "Forbid him, for he followeth not us"! "He that planteth and he that watereth are *one*," was his language: "let a man so account of *us*," of all of us, "as of the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

I cannot but think, my brethren, that St. Paul's conduct and counsel on this occasion suggest a lesson which might serve to regulate most beneficially the mutual intercourse of those numerous bodies of sincere but differing believers into which the Christian church is now divided. I pretend not to say, for I am far from thinking, that in the present state of the church of Christ such divisions are needless and schismatical. I believe them, on the contrary, in many at least, if not the majority of instances, to be absolutely necessary to excite attention to the important subject of religion generally,—to supply means and opportunities for the honest, clear, and full expression of individual opinion,—and to provide channels sufficiently numerous and various for the conveyance of the waters of life to every district of the world. Many sects there *must*, and, in my opinion, it is even desirable that there should, be; but they need not, and as disciples of Christ they ought not, to manifest a spirit so narrow, so exclusive, so uncharitable, in short, so

sectarian, as, for the most part, they seem inclined to cherish towards each other. In their bodily partition, which we allow to be necessary and inevitable, there might still be a union of spirit. For the establishment of such a union nothing more would be required than that each sect should resolve to be guided in the regulation of its conduct, both internal and external, in its treatment both of those that sincerely adhere to, and those that honestly dissent from, its doctrine and discipline, by the precept of the Apostle, "Let a man so account of us as of the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

In the first place, let all of us so account of *ourselves*. If, as professing Christians, we constantly bore in mind our relation to our great Master,—if we remembered that our sole object, as members of different sects, is to discover, by serious and diligent examination, and to promulgate, by calm and conclusive argument, that true religion which our common Lord once delivered to the saints,—if we never lost sight of the important truth, that we are stewards, under God, of all the treasures, intellectual and spiritual, physical and temporal, which he has committed to our care, and that He will expect all of us to render a reason of the hope that is in us, and to shew cause for the opinions that we have professed, as well as the actions that we have performed, in the last day,—methinks we should enter with a more calm and charitable, a more serious and earnest

spirit, into the investigation of heavenly truths; we should discover that religion is much too important a subject to be made the occasion of hasty and angry disputes; we should conduct our own, and aid each other's search, with awakened minds, and hearts made one by the love of God and Christ, and of that truth which they invite us to search out and contemplate for our souls' benefit.

But while we thus account of *ourselves*, as of Christ's servants, and stewards of the treasures of the gospel, let us be willing likewise so to account of our *fellow-christians*. Cheerfully let us concede to them, as we firmly claim for ourselves, the right to think of Christ, to speak of him, and to serve him, according to their conscience,—to form their own impartial estimate of those truths which his word contains,—to watch over and dispense, with what shall seem to them all good fidelity, that portion of the gospel treasure which is committed to their care, and for the use, neglect, or abuse of which they only will have to answer. Never let *us* doubt *their* honesty, never let *them* question *ours*, without proof; for we have all an equal interest in being faithful: deep is that interest: it involves our eternal welfare. Why, then, should any of us be hastily deemed capable, or lightly accused, of trifling with it? Is not the day coming, and do not we all look forward to it, when a strict account shall be taken of our service and our stewardship by our Saviour and our God? In that day we shall every one

of us have enough to answer for: let it not be added to the catalogue of our offences, for assuredly the addition will be a heavy and a grievous one, that, unmindful of our ignorance and frailty, we voluntarily stood forward as the accusers of our brethren, and when we knew not our own hearts, nor could tell what manner of spirit they were of, pretended to search out the hidden secrets of theirs. "Charity thinketh no evil"—"Charity hopeth all things." Her estimate of human character *may*, nay, often *must*, be too favourable; yet will that error, if there be truth in Scripture, draw down a blessing, which the keenest scrutiny, the ablest and minutest dissection of motives that censoriousness could ever boast of, will fail to secure. Fellow-christians, of various denominations, till you have proof to the contrary, proof that will satisfy a meek and charitable, as well as a fervent and zealous mind, believe, or at the very least hope, that those who differ from you are sincere in their professions. Much as you may think them mistaken in opinion, relinquish not, without strong evidence, your faith in their integrity. Remember that you differ as widely from them as they from you, and that the mere difference, considered as a proof of dishonesty, has no greater force or validity on the one side than on the other. One or both may be wrong, and yet neither wilfully so. Account, then, of each other, till you have positive evidence on which to found a less favourable opinion, as honest servants of Christ, and faithful

stewards, according to the knowledge which you severally possess, of the mysteries of God.

Assuredly, we grant with the Apostle, "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Fidelity is expected from them in the preservation, and also in the employment and distribution, of the property committed to their care. They are bound faithfully to preserve their Lord's possessions; to see to it that they be not injured either in quantity or quality—that nothing be dishonestly abstracted from them—and that they be not corrupted or deteriorated by any impure or hurtful addition. The possessions thus faithfully preserved, they are further bound faithfully to employ and improve, to store up or distribute, to apply immediately to their Lord's use, or that of others, according to his will. These are the duties of all stewards, and amongst the rest, of those to whom God entrusts the care and distribution of his word. The steward of God and of Christ is under a solemn obligation to keep whole and inviolate the treasure of the gospel: to him, as to the follower of Moses, the injunction is given, "Thou shalt not add unto the word which I command thee, neither shalt thou diminish aught from it, that thou mayst keep the commandments of the Lord thy God which I command thee." It was the express injunction of Jesus to his disciples, that "they should teach men to observe *all* things whatsoever he had commanded them," and that they must not "be ashamed either of him or of *his words*,"

if they would not that he also should be ashamed of them in the great day of retribution. They were to preach his doctrine in its purity and integrity, and they were to preach it, moreover, with diligence and zeal: they were to be active and industrious as well as wise stewards, giving to each member of the household his portion of meat, and giving it likewise in due season.

Such is the character of the faithful stewards of Christ, and of the character thus described we have a most illustrious example in the Apostle himself. He was indeed, what he exhorted his youthful friend to be, "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He could truly testify that his labours had been more abundant than those of all his brethren in the apostleship, and that they had been faithfully directed to the one great end, the dissemination of the gospel of Christ in its completeness and its purity. "Ye know," said he in his most impressive and affecting address to the church of Ephesus, recorded in the book of Acts (ch. xx.), "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and trials which befel me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying, both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance to-

ward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. —I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you *all* the counsel of God." "We are not as many," says he to the church of Corinth, "who corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ." And again addressing the same church, "Therefore we, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Thus did the Apostle testify of himself, and call upon those who had the best means of judging to bear him record; nor can we doubt, from all that we know of his noble and energetic character, that his testimony of himself was strictly true, and that if Christ ever had a faithful steward upon earth,—a disciple honest and fearless to speak all the truth, and zealous to speak the truth to all,—Paul was that disciple. And yet, my friends, it appears that there were Christians who impeached the fidelity of Paul, who accused him, as we may infer from his vindication of himself, of corrupting the word of God, and wilfully misrepresenting the doctrine of Christ. Paul was assailed by calumny; and can we then hope to escape uncalumniated? Even his fidelity

was questioned by some; and can we then expect that all should deem us faithful? Assuredly, my brethren, whatever claims we may put in for ourselves as a sect, few, if any, of us can pretend to fidelity like his. There are not many Unitarians, it must be granted,—are there many, let me ask, of any other sect?—who have exercised their Christian stewardship like Paul. By the contemplation of such a model we cannot but feel deeply humbled: may the honest shame which it excites be followed by a virtuous emulation! In one respect, however, and that, too, one in which it has been our lot to sustain a more than usual share of opprobrium, I will venture to assert that our fidelity is as unstained as that of any of our fellow-christians,—not less so, I humbly trust, even than that of the great Apostle himself. We have often been accused of wilfully mutilating, corrupting, and perverting the word of God. This accusation, so far as any individual member of a social body can speak for the rest, I hesitate not most positively to deny. In the name of every honest Unitarian, and I trust the existence of some few of this description will be admitted, I assert that we have not knowingly abstracted a single particle from the treasure of revealed truth, that we have not intentionally perverted from its true meaning any portion, however small, of God's revealed will; and let me add, moreover, that we should have exactly the same right to accuse our fellow-christians of wilfully adulterating the treasures of

Divine Truth with human additions, as they have to accuse us of wilfully mutilating and curtailing them. In truth, no such right is possessed by either party. It is the privilege and duty of every Christian to form his own conscientious opinion, upon a diligent and impartial review of the evidence submitted to him, both as to what is the word of God, and how it is to be understood. No man is authorized to dictate to another what he shall believe or what he shall not believe,—what scriptural documents he shall receive or not receive as genuine and authentic records of his Master's will, or how he shall interpret what he sees reason to regard as such. On these subjects he is not merely at liberty, he is under a most sacred obligation, to form his own judgment according to his best ability. Wicked and foolish indeed will he be if he conduct such an examination with levity and carelessness,—if he proceed in it without a deep sense of his accountability to God, without a serious and heartfelt wish to learn what the will of God really is, that he may be implicitly guided by it in his practice. Almost beyond conception will be his wickedness and folly if he knowingly reject any revealed truth, or substitute for a single thought of God any imagination of man. Sincere Christians may differ as to the meaning of their Master's words, and the media of their transmission, but of his will, once perceived and understood, every sincere and honest Christian will at least endeavour to be a faithful steward. Let us not, then, accuse each

other without proof of wilfully corrupting or perverting the Divine law, since this is a degree of guilt and folly of which no truly good man can be capable; but while we all endeavour to deepen our own convictions of that thorough rectitude, that inflexible integrity, that persevering diligence, which our Christian stewardship requires of us, let us leave it to God to judge our brethren, taking care, when we have the power, to lose no opportunity of giving them friendly warning when we think them wrong, or friendly assistance and encouragement when we believe them to be right.

Should false accusations, however, be brought against ourselves, should we be calumniated as faithless stewards of our heavenly treasure, St. Paul admirably instructs us how we are to reply. "With me," said he, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment:" as though he had said, "I have admitted that the true light in which I myself, and my associates in the gospel ministry, are to be regarded, is that of servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God: I have admitted also, that of every such steward it is required that he be found faithful; but I cannot admit that either you, or any being, or number of beings, merely human, are competent to decide on my fidelity, or to say how far I have satisfied, or failed to satisfy, in this respect, the claims of my conscience, my Saviour, and my God. Were my conduct honoured

by your unanimous suffrage, it would be no certain proof of its rectitude to me; though 'all men should speak well of me,' I have learned, from the highest authority, that sin and woe might still be mine. Nor are your censures any more conclusive of the nature and measure of my deserts, than your applause. To you it is not given to search out the secrets of the breast: you are but men—as such, no less liable to blame than to applaud unjustly. In the experience of the world it has often happened that both truth and virtue have met with a very different reception from that which they had a right to claim, and that, too, not from insulated individuals merely, but from the great masses of mankind. History will tell us of times and seasons when the advocates of truth have been every where spoken against, and the friends of virtue regarded and represented as evil doers. I must appeal, therefore, from your decision upon my character and conduct, to one of far higher authority. Deeming it of very small consequence how you judge me, I must seek the suffrage of a judgment that cannot err."

And here observe, my friends, the wise caution and deep humility of Paul. He would not trust even to *his own* judgment to pass a full and final sentence upon himself. "Yea, I judge not mine own self," said he. To his own mind he stood acquitted of all the evil that had been charged upon him. He could truly say, after examining his

heart, on the subject of the faults imputed by his enemies, that "he was conscious of nothing." Nevertheless, he indulged in no vehement protestations of faultless excellence; he advanced no boastful claims to exemption from frailty and sin. He was aware that the heart of man is often deceitful,—that prejudice, partiality, self-ignorance, and self-love, often blind us to our own errors and defects, and he would not, therefore, pronounce absolutely, that there was no shade of justice in any of the accusations which his enemies had brought against him. "His own heart," it was true, "condemned him not," and therefore "he had confidence towards God:" but it was a modest confidence, an humble, self-abased trust, such as the best of our frail race should feel, when he submits his thoughts and actions to the searching eye of the Omniscient, —a trust kept in awe by holy fear, a confidence which, while it might have fearlessly addressed to God the words which Peter spake to our Lord, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," would have deemed it far from superfluous to add the Psalmist's humbling reflection and earnest prayer, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "I am conscious of nothing," said the Apostle; "yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

How constantly do we find merit and modesty, true worth and humility, combined! Lightly as Paul thought of the unjust censures of his enemies, satisfied as he felt with that calm and dignified refutation of their slanders which the still voice of conscience had pronounced, he was not tempted, in the warmth of self-congratulation, to forget that he was frail, or to lose sight of the awful truth, that there is but one judge whose decision upon our conduct is absolutely infallible and final, and will often, there is every reason to believe, greatly modify, sometimes perhaps entirely reverse, the previous decisions of all minor judges, even conscience herself not excepted. With filial love that hoped to be approved, with filial awe that feared to have offended, Paul refused to yield implicit credit even to his own self-scrutinizing judgment. He might be wrong, he remembered: God only must be right. The creature cannot know itself as the Creator knows it. In reverential silence, therefore, he resolved to await the final sentence of the Supreme Arbiter, to which, whether favourable or otherwise, he was prepared to bow with deep, unquestioning submission. He hoped not to know his own mind perfectly, till he should see it reflected, as it were, in the perfect mirror of his Father's. Then do we know, indeed, when God makes known. As the clear description of an object or event, by one who thoroughly under-

stands its nature and relations, will often convey a far more accurate idea of it, to the ignorant mind, than actual inspection would,—so is it with the revelations of God, whatever be their subject. His pictures are always more clear than any views that we can take of the wonderful originals, graciously framed, as they are, with a perfect adaptation to the near focus and narrow field of our mental vision. We never understand God perfectly, till he condescends to become his own interpreter. We see not his works clearly, (and our own minds are far from being the least curious and complicated in structure, or the most easily intelligible part of them,) till he deigns to shew them to us. Paul knew this, and he would not, therefore, even in reply to accusations which he believed to be altogether false, assume the tone of unqualified self-vindication. "I am conscious of nothing," were his words; "yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." "Therefore," he concludes, "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise,"—his due praise, the Apostle evidently means, that portion of approbation, more or less mingled with censure, which his conduct shall have deserved—"from God."

To sum up the Apostle's counsel, then—the

Christian, when calumniated, is to reply, not by vehement retaliation of obloquy and insult, not by angry denial, not even by unqualified self-vindication; but by calmly disclaiming his consciousness of faults which, upon mature reflection and honest self-examination, he does not believe himself to have committed; by humbly conceding at the same time his liability to sin and error; and finally, by referring his accusers to the decision of that awful day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the sole important consideration will be, not how we, in our ignorant and presumptuous folly, have judged each other, but how the most wise and merciful of Beings will judge us all.

My Unitarian brethren, let the advice of this great and good man, enforced as it was by his bright example, sink into our hearts. It is true that we have been, and are to this day, grievously calumniated by many of our fellow-members of the Christian church. Under the influence of ignorance and prejudice, the pious and the good amongst them have too frequently united with the unprincipled and the malignant to misrepresent us. Regarding us as enemies of God and of his Christ, they have "verily thought within themselves" that they ought to withhold from us, as such, even that measure of kindly feeling and courteous, not to say fair and honourable, treatment, which they refuse not to accord to the members of every other sect. What

then? Shall we on this account shrink abashed from the presence of our fellow-men? Shall we retire intimidated from the contest with error? Shall we speak no more of what we deem the eternal truths of the gospel? Shall we fear to proclaim our apostolic creed, "To us there is but one God, even the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ"? God forbid that the fear of mortal man should effectually work this snare for us! Rather let us rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame, if need be, for a cause which we regard as that of God and of his Christ. We stand at the judgment-seat of the Searcher of hearts: we are amenable to him, my brethren, and to him only, for our conduct as disciples of his Son. Anticipating his sentence, let us deeply feel, and give utterance to the feeling in no spirit of supercilious aversion and contempt, but in that of meekness and love unfeigned, that "with us it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment." Not that we regard that judgment as in itself a matter of indifference, or feel no regret that we are condemned unjustly by it; far otherwise,—we prize the good opinion and the sympathy of our Christian brethren; we would gladly extend to all of them, even to those who differ most widely from us, the hand of fellowship, and should rejoice to meet their answering grasp; we are grieved that they should look upon us with a cold, unfriendly eye; we wish that they could justly appreciate our

motives and principles of action, and could learn to know us, at the very least, as honest searchers after truth ; their uncharitable judgments we *do* consider as a subject of *no small regret;* but we regard them not as a source of any apprehension. In this view it is that we deem them of little consequence. In this view we desire to account it "a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment." Let the fear of God, my brethren, cast out of our minds every other fear : let us only strive, with the Apostle, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man : let us study to approve ourselves to the Great Lord and Father of all, good servants and obedient children : then shall we have no need to tremble at human judgments. "The curse causeless, as the swallow in its flying, will not light ;"—the censures of the frail and fallible will play like harmless lightnings round us, illuminating whom they cannot injure ; and the day at length will come, if not in this world, surely in the next, when we shall no longer be excluded by prejudice or misconception from any good man's love, but being wholly one with the Father and the Son, shall be one also with every brother of the human family.

O happy day ! when prejudice and bigotry shall take their flight, to return no more ; when no interposing veil of orthodoxy or heresy shall have power for a moment to conceal the friend and bro-

ther from our view; when, in the language of a writer* who rejoiced to record the feelings of pure delight with which he once welcomed to his heart the profession of a creed different from his own, "every unkind prepossession shall drop off without effort, and every lurking suspicion be reviewed and dismissed at the tribunal of reason: when the whole mind, as if relieved from a long and galling pressure, at one moment shall repose in security, and at another expand with joy: when it shall deeply receive every favourable impression made upon it by new and juster views of things, and shall fondly contemplate intellectual and moral excellence, wherever found, with heightened sagacity and enlarged benevolence!"

Even in this world, my friends, our observation of the signs of the times may lead us to hope for an approximation to this happy state. Even now, blessed be the Author of every good and perfect gift, we see Christians of different sects beginning to regard each other kindly, to speak of each other candidly, to treat each other liberally. While we earnestly pray for the diffusion of this good spirit, may we do all in our power to promote it! May we be known to the world, not only as those who dare to

* See Dr. Parr's Sequel to Curtis's Printed Paper, Part II., p. 100, where he adverts to his prejudices against Dr. Priestley, previously to his personal intercourse with him, and the subsequent dispersion of them.

think for themselves, and to speak what they think, but as those also who cheerfully allow and earnestly maintain the right which all our fellow-christians, all our fellow-men possess, to give free utterance to their honest sentiments. Searching for truth with seriousness and diligence ourselves, and kindly assisting the search of others, may we leave it to God to pass his sentence upon the erroneous, and pray to him to remove, as speedily as may be consistent with his infinite wisdom, all the sources of error. Amen.

APPENDIX.

Note, p. 18.

I TRUST that few such passages as that which I have quoted are to be found in the pages of modern controversy. I add, with pleasure, that my memory does not enable me to refer to one in which the province of the Searcher of hearts is so directly invaded, or the injunction of the Redeemer against hasty and uncharitable judgments, in appearance at least, so completely set at defiance. Even Mr. Taylor himself must, I think, upon mature reflection, deeply regret having imputed to a whole sect of his fellow-christians, or, should he dispute our title to that name, to a whole class of his fellow-men, the heinous guilt of "hating in their hearts" one whom they affect to reverence and love; of attempting to dethrone, or by sly insinuation to lower and degrade, one whom they openly profess to honour and obey as their anointed King. If he thus think of us, well indeed may Mr. T. question our possession of any degree of moral excellence, however small: well may he infer that we are as utterly regardless in our hearts of the second table of the law, as he is pleased to *assume*,—upon what evidence does not appear,—that we are of the first. Beyond a doubt, if we are justly described in the above-cited passage, we must be persons of the most depraved characters, and the question, "Whether Socinians have not their immoralities too?" might have been dispensed with as altogether superfluous; and yet this is the book of which the Eclectic Reviewer thus speaks—"Mr. Taylor's volume abounds with striking remarks, and preserves *throughout* the tone of firm but *affectionate* remonstrance. That it will give great offence to Unitarians, he doubtless anticipates: it is not for them he writes. Enough has been written on the Socinian controversy; but a work was wanted that should be *proper to be put into the hands of a young person* in danger of imbibing the contagion of scepticism. For this purpose the volume is *excellently adapted;* and we trust that its extensive usefulness will

realize the hope and prayer expressed by the venerable author." I remember with pleasure that this Reviewer's "*we*," though it has the plural form, has but a singular meaning, and I am quite willing and disposed to believe that the Reviewer, in this instance, is singular indeed. The judicious friends of Mr. Taylor in his own denomination, sincerely and earnestly as they may join with him in condemning the opinions against which he writes, will, I am persuaded, regret the manner and spirit of his opposition, and will lament that the respectable author, to whom and to whose family the world has been heretofore so much indebted, should have published, in his latter days, a work so unworthy of his fair fame, and of what they will doubtless regard as the good cause which he had to advocate. Had the Reviewer been, what a Reviewer ought to be, the judicious and impartial friend both of the author and the public, I cannot think that he would have felt himself justified in describing Mr. Taylor's book either as "preserving throughout an affectionate tone," or as "treating the subject of the criminality of error in a satisfactory manner." He cannot surely think that the tone of the passage above referred to is "affectionate." Can he deny that it contains imputations which an immediate revelation from God alone could have warranted the author in casting upon any body of men? Can he deny that the tone of it is, to the common ear at least, whatever may have been the inward feelings of the author, that of bitter and unmitigated hostility against persons who, because they have read the Scriptures with different eyes and minds from Mr. Taylor's, are set down by him as haters of Christ, as rebels animated by "rancorous ill-will against the Lord and against his Anointed," and prepared to resort to every means, whether of "sly insinuation" or open opposition, to carry their treasonable designs into effect? By what critical chemistry can a single drop of the milk of human kindness be detected in this passage? Will even Mr. Taylor himself venture to assert that it was dictated by "charity of the sweetest kind"? The Reviewer admits that "all mental error which is unconnected with the state of the heart, all unbelief which does not involve disobedience, is innocent:" he grants that "there could be no guilt in erroneous opinions, if those opinions were not the result of the per-

verting influence of moral pravity." Perhaps he will further concede that this test of his is one which it requires a power of searching the heart to apply: but if so, how can he justify the professed application of it by Mr. Taylor, or any other *uninspired* child of mortality? There is only one mode of reasoning by means of which the Reviewer can reconcile his own concessions with his avowed approbation of Mr. Taylor's book. Should he maintain the propriety and validity of what is called *reasoning in a circle*, he may then be allowed, upon his own principles, first to maintain that the opinions of the supposed heretic are criminally erroneous, solely because they result from the perverting influence of moral pravity, and then to prove the existence of that pravity by a simple reference to what he chooses to denominate the criminal, erroneous nature of the heretic's opinions.

Should the Reviewer, however, not approve of this mode of reasoning, his expressed convictions should have obliged him to record his disapprobation of Mr. Taylor's uncharitable judgments. With respect to the subject of the criminality of error, though I am not by any means prepared to assent to all that Dr. Wardlaw has written upon it, yet I must be of opinion that the Eclectic Reviewer has done him great injustice in associating his name as he has done with Mr. Taylor's. This subject, he says, "is fully and satisfactorily treated by Dr. Wardlaw and Mr. Taylor in the works before us." Now, whatever might be the Reviewer's opinion, few, I think, will fail to perceive that Mr. T. treats the subject in a widely different manner from Dr. W., and that his ideas upon it are, in comparison with that gentleman's, very indistinct and confused; so much so, that he might have been, with great propriety, recommended to peruse carefully Dr. W.'s tract, as calculated to put him in possession of some useful information, which he appears to need. Mr. Taylor's advice to young Christians of his own persuasion is doubtless well fitted to keep them *where they are*, and would have been equally so had he and they been Roman Catholics, Mussulmen, or professors of any other sect, Christian or Pagan: it is, in fact, if I do not altogether misunderstand it, the very reverse of the Apostle Paul's. Take for granted all things that *we* assume to be orthodox and essen-

tial, says Mr. Taylor, and hold fast that which you have; "*Prove all things*," says St. Paul, without any reservation, "and hold fast that which is good." Let me recommend to every "young doubter," and young believer also, this apostolic refutation of the false and dangerous idea that there can be sin in any conclusion to which the mind is naturally led by the serious, humble, unprejudiced, and diligent investigation either of God's works or word. "It concerns all persons," says the pious and eloquent Jeremy Taylor, "to see *that they do their best to find out truth*, and if they do, it is certain that, let the error be never so damnable, they shall escape the error, or the misery of being damned for it. Whatsoever is not to be avoided, as errors which are incident to the best and most inquisitive of men, are *not* offences against God."

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REASON THE HANDMAID OF RELIGION:

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE SUPPORTERS

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 10, 1829.

BY

WILLIAM HAMILTON DRUMMOND, D.D.

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1829.

A SERMON.

MATT. vi. 22, 23:

THE LIGHT OF THE BODY IS THE EYE; IF, THEREFORE, THINE EYE BE SINGLE, THY WHOLE BODY SHALL BE FULL OF LIGHT. BUT IF THINE EYE BE EVIL, THY WHOLE BODY SHALL BE FULL OF DARKNESS. IF, THEREFORE, THE LIGHT THAT IS IN THEE BE DARKNESS, HOW GREAT IS THAT DARKNESS!

THE analogy between corporeal and intellectual vision has been frequently observed; reason being to the mind as the organ of sight to the body. While the eye is single, or in a state of physical soundness and perfection, it gives light to the whole frame, directing the movements of the feet and the operations of the hands. But when it is injured or diseased, objects appear to it double, distorted, or discoloured. When it is quite extinguished, the body is left in total darkness, the whole beauty of creation disappears, and "wisdom is at one entrance quite shut out." So it is with reason, man's distinguishing faculty. While it is sound and vigorous, strengthened by exercise, illumined by knowledge, and directed by precepts of evangelic wisdom, it serves as a guide to all that is great and

good, and beautiful and happy. But when it is darkened by ignorance, debased by superstition, and corrupted by prejudices, evil customs, or sensual passions, it loses the power of discrimination; then it can neither contemplate the beauty of truth nor appreciate the dictates of virtue, nor reach the conclusions to which its own premises most distinctly lead. When it is altogether extinct, man has lost all that constitutes the dignity of his nature. He ceases to be responsible—he becomes frantic or idiotic—a melancholy monument of human nature in ruins—an object of terror or compassion. "The light that is in him is darkness, and how great is that darkness!"

No wonder, then, that the faculty of reason should merit and obtain the encomiums of the virtuous and the wise, and that of all the various gifts for which we should be grateful to heaven, that of a sound mind claims a just preference. For what, but for his intellectual similitude to the Most High, is man said in Holy Writ to be formed in the image of his Creator? For what, but for this, does David, in his beautiful eulogy on the dignity and superiority of man, declare that God has "crowned him with honour and glory, made him to have dominion over the work of his hands, put all things under his feet, and made him but a little lower than the angels"? Without reason he could have neither glory nor dominion, nor any faculty in which he would not be surpassed by the inferior creatures. He is exceeded

in strength by the elephant, in keenness of vision by the lynx and the eagle, in hearing by the mole, and in fleetness by every winged inhabitant of air. But wisdom is better than strength. "Knowledge is power." Reason arms him with weapons that are stronger than the lion and fleeter than the roe. She teaches him to wield the elements of nature to his use, to disarm the thunder of its terrors, to make fire and vapour his ministers, to combat and overcome the torrent and the storm, and, by potent enginery, surpass in the power and multiplicity of his operations all that has been fabled of demi-gods and giants with their hundred hands.

Reason, then, is a faculty not to be despised, but, on the contrary, highly valued as a treasure bestowed by the Father of all, from whom descendeth every good and every perfect gift. "The spirit of man," says the author of the book of Proverbs, "is the candle of the Lord;" or, more elegantly, "the lamp of Jehovah." It is a ray of his divine intelligence to direct us—a spark of ethereal fire to animate our bosoms. Of this spirit, reason is the noblest attribute. To neglect its cultivation is to undervalue the gift and dishonour the Giver; for it was bestowed not to be neglected—not to be hidden like the talent of the unprofitable servant in the ground—not to be placed like "a candle under a bushel," or locked up like "a lamp in a sepulchre." Of all his gifts, God requires the proper and legitimate use, and of none more than this; for none is

more valuable, none of which the neglect is attended by more unhappy consequences on the one hand, nor the proper use by more beneficial results on the other. From its neglect or perversion spring ignorance and error, fanaticism and infidelity, crime and misery; from its due cultivation, faith, knowledge, virtue, happiness. Were men always directed by the rules of right reason, they would never incur the reproach of folly, nor become the victims of delusion and sin.

But notwithstanding all that may be urged in commendation of this noble faculty, how many are there, even in the present enlightened age, who exert all their ingenuity to decry it, and to prove that it is the most dangerous and fallacious guide, especially in questions of theology and the interpretation of Holy Writ! They expatiate on its blindness, shallowness, and inveterate corruption. "It is a false and wandering light," they exclaim, "to lead us into a wilderness of heretical opinions and damnable heresies; that, therefore, when we take up the Sacred Volume, we should lay reason aside, understand literally and submit implicitly to all its dictates, both as to faith and practice." Admitting the latter part of this statement, it may be asked, How are we to affix any meaning even to the simplest and most intelligible words of Scripture—with reason or without reason? We must understand a proposition before we can have any conviction of its truth. Let us clearly see what the Scriptures

demand, and we will submit to it without the least demur or hesitation. But we will not submit to what men, who declaim against reason, tell us is the meaning of Scripture. They shall not be our interpreters. We will interpret for ourselves, by the aid of such powers as God has given us; and who shall deprive us of our right, or terrify us from its enjoyment? It is a common artifice, indeed, with theologians, to silence objections which they cannot answer, by affirming that they spring from carnal reason. If we do not see objects in the colours and attitudes in which they are pleased to represent them, they cry out our vision is corrupt. Notwithstanding that inherent depravity of their nature for which they contend, it would seem that they have a perfect assurance of their own infallibility, and that all who do not yield implicit credence, not to the Scripture, but to the meaning which they are pleased to fix on it, must be wilfully blind and obstinate. This is the very spirit of Popery, and who will affirm that it does not exercise tyrannical domination in many a Protestant church?

Into the question concerning man's innate corruption I do not at present enter; nor can I lose time in refuting the slanders by which human nature is maligned. As to our reason, whether it be corrupt or not, it is the light which God has given us, and which it is incumbent on us to employ in all our investigations. We should keep it always trimmed and ready for use. If liable, as we admit,

to be dimmed by the mists of prejudice, or extinguished by the storms of passion, we should guard it the more carefully against such casualties; we should keep it in brightness and activity by study and reflection. To say that we should neglect its use because we have the superior light of Scripture, is much the same as to say that we should put out our eyes because we have telescopes and microscopes to shew many of the wonders of nature which could never be discovered without them. Were we destitute of reason, the Scriptures would be as useless to us as pictures to the blind, music to the deaf, and sweetmeats to a mouth deprived of the palate. We could neither see the beauty nor feel the force of any moral or religious truth. We should not be accountable, but might take our rank, and it would not be a high one, among the irrational creatures. Many Heathen nations have ideas both of religion and virtue; nay, some of them have entertained as sublime notions of God, and practised as pure a morality, as *some* who call themselves Christians. For, as Job teaches, "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty gives him understanding." Whence were their notions derived, but from the exercise of reason? From what but from the exercise of the same faculty on the evidences of religion, are we ourselves persuaded that the Bible is a revelation of the Divine will? What is faith itself but a full persuasion and assent of the mind to what the gospel reveals, founded on reason and sup-

ported by testimony? Those who would overcome the objections of Unbelievers, or make converts from Heathenism to Christianity, must employ arguments suited to convince the understanding. A sceptic will not be satisfied, nor an idolater convinced, by the mere affirmation of a believer that the Bible is the word of God. They demand proof, and they have a right to demand it, even on scriptural grounds. God did not require the children of Israel to receive the instructions of Moses without affording them ample evidence of his divine appointment. Moses, aware of the obstinacy and incredulity of the people, distrusted the efficacy of his powers to convince them, and said, "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." On this, God enabled him to exhibit such documents of his veracity as it was impossible to resist —the serpent rod, the leprous hand, the river water converted into blood. Moses still continued to plead, urged his want of eloquence, and declared that his natural slowness of speech rendered him unfit for the office. Then the Lord asked him, "Who made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" And when he still evinced reluctance, Aaron was appointed to be spokesman to the people, that every thing relative to the divine appointment of Moses might be explained fully and clearly to their satisfaction.—Our blessed Saviour

himself did not require the Jews to receive him as their Prophet and Messiah without giving the most satisfactory evidence of the truth of his pretensions. He taught them by reasoning with them; by rational expositions and interpretations of their own Scriptures, and by all the arguments and address which the best reasoners employ; by appealing to their own hearts and affections, to their natural sense of right and wrong; and by leading them to deduce consequences from the premises which they had themselves laid down. We also find him reprehending them for not exercising their understanding so actively or so judiciously as became them. "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" He confuted the infidelity of the Sadducees, and proved the certainty of a future state, by a rational deduction of consequences from the words of Moses: "As touching the dead, that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Ye, therefore, do greatly err." Mark xii. 26, 27.*

* "When the Pharisees ascribed his miraculous operations to the confederacy of *evil spirits*, with what simplicity and STRENGTH OF REASONING did he expose the despicable inconsistency and malig-

" Judge not," said he, " according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Be not swayed in your decision of any question by the mere form which it is made to assume, nor by the sound of the words in which it is communicated; but interpret and decide by principles of rectitude and truth.— The apostles followed the example and instructions of their Master, and made energetic appeals to the reason of both Heathens and Jews. Paul, in particular, was eminently distinguished as a sound logician. He combated the prejudices of his opponents, not with frothy and noisy declamation, which would have only provoked their contempt; but by the weighty artillery of arguments which they had no power to withstand. When he caused Felix to tremble, he was not uttering tautological rhapsodies, but reasoning; and on what? On none of those mysterious points of divinity which many consider as all in all; but on " righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." By his mode of discussing those important evangelical topics, he found his way to the understanding of the judge, and roused those natural feelings of remorse which had been slumbering in his bosom. The Epistles of this great

nant prejudices of these miserable cavillers! *A family divided against itself cannot stand.* ' If *my* miracles are the work of *Beelzebub*, by whose power do *your* disciples pretend to work them?'— ' Whoso entereth *a strong man's house* and plundereth his goods, is *stronger than he.*' Truths of intuition—mere *axioms* of morality." WAKEFIELD.

apostle are distinguished throughout for the depth and accuracy of their reasoning. Their meaning is often to be reached only by carefully following the chain of their argument link by link. But from an irrational interpretation of insulated passages, and from inattention to their general scope, and to the peculiarities of their style, they have been supposed to favour certain tenets altogether hostile to genuine Christianity. Had the same rational principles which are necessary to the right understanding of all other argumentative or didactic compositions been admitted here, it would have been well for the tranquillity of the Christian world; and the religion of the gospel would not have been scandalized by an alliance with dogmas so much opposed to its pure and benevolent dictates.

No doubt, many of the most essential truths of Christianity are luminous as the meridian sun, level to the capacity of children, and expressed in language the most easily understood. Yet how many of its simplest precepts and revelations are so distorted from their true meaning, as to be made instrumental to the subversion of the truth, from want of judgment to extract the spirit from the letter of the terms in which they are communicated! Well did our Saviour warn us against the danger of interpreting his expressions too literally, when he said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi. 63); meaning by spirit the figurative sense, and by flesh the lite-

ral. Many of his precepts and doctrines are clothed in a rich and glowing oriental tissue of language and imagery, of which they must be divested before we can ascertain the plain truths which they are intended to enforce. Thus in a style of peculiar energy he enjoins us to mortify and subdue every sinful passion, by desiring us to cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye, rather than suffer them to repeat or commit an offence. Now no one, who had ever studied the use of language, could be so absurd as to take these expressions in the literal sense, and act upon them accordingly. Notwithstanding, such instances of folly have actually occurred. A man has been guilty of the atrocity of amputating his right hand, because it had been, or he feared it might become, the instrument of crime. Another, on receiving a blow, presents his cheek to the smiter, thinking himself under an obligation thus "to fulfil all righteousness." Such instances as these, and a multitude of others might be adduced, are sufficient to establish the position, that reason must be taken as the ally of religion, and that without its aid we should be in constant danger of misunderstanding and lamentably perverting the word of God. Indeed, this is so palpable a truism, that you may well feel inclined to ask wherefore should it be mentioned in a society like this. The object, then, is to shew, that if reason be an indispensable auxiliary to the right understanding of the simplest truths and most intelligible precepts of Scripture,

much more is it indispensable to conduct us to a right interpretation of those which are complex and obscure; and so far from repressing inquiry, and contenting ourselves with saying that such and such doctrines are mysterious and beyond us, and therefore to be adopted with blind and implicit faith, we should bring to their elucidation all the powers we possess, and try whether those passages of Scripture on which they are said to be founded, are not capable of a rational explanation; for it never could be the object of revelation—indeed, the very idea involves a contradiction — to give us mysteries to perplex, instead of principles to enlighten and precepts to direct us.

To those who have adopted, or are bound to support, certain systems of divinity, reason is frequently a very troublesome intruder. They will admit it, indeed, with pleasure while its deductions harmonize with their system; but the instant it controverts any one of their tenets, they begin to declaim against it. It is then an unholy weapon in the hands of unregenerated man; and yet it is the very weapon which they themselves employ to crush the hollow opinions of those who are still more its enemies than themselves. Ask some member of the Reformed Church, wherefore he rejects the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, when the words "*This is my body*" are so expressly in favour of that mystery. The answer will probably be, because reason rejects the literal acceptation

of the terms as involving contradiction and impossibility. This is well. Now we maintain that there is not a text in the Bible so strong in support of the doctrine of the Eternal Mind being composed of three persons, as this text for the *real presence;* and if there were, we should reject it, precisely on the same principles, as contrary to reason, as involving the most hideous absurdities, and subverting the fundamental truth both of natural and revealed religion, that God is One.

Again, let an orthodox Protestant be asked why he rejects tradition, when the apostle gives a positive charge to the Thessalonians "to stand fast and hold the traditions which they have been taught, whether by word or his Epistle." The reply will probably be, that the traditions to which the apostle alludes are the great truths contained in the gospel, and not a new system of ethics, ceremonies, or doctrines, such as are adopted by the Roman Catholic Church; that it is not to be supposed that the Author and Finisher of our faith would entrust to any man, or to any body of men, the exclusive power of interpreting Scripture, and combining it with tenets not committed to writing; that such a power would infallibly be abused, and that its admission would be attended by the same deplorable consequences among Christians as among the Pharisees, whom our Lord charges with having made the commandments of God of no effect by their tradition. This also is well: and on the same principles we contend

against any addition being made to the word of God, whether it be Athanasian and Nicene creeds, confessions of faith, or dogmas named "articles," many of which have no better authority for their support than the traditions which are decried.

The use of reason in deciding on the former question is cheerfully admitted by many who would exclaim loudly against it in the latter, though the cases are almost precisely the same; for it is regarded as a friend or enemy just as it happens to accord or disagree with men's systems and prepossessions. It is an able and welcome ally to the creed-loving, priest-ridden semi-protestant, when he enters the polemic arena against the Roman Catholic, but carnal and to be shunned when brought to the demolition of his own system by one who owns no master but Christ. Indeed, the easiest mode of reconciling the mind to any absurdity is to affirm that it is a mystery beyond the comprehension of our limited faculties; that it is prudent to acquiesce in the reception of that faith which the wisdom of powerful ecclesiastical establishments has adopted, and not oppose our solitary objections to the great mass of human authority. Such allegations are very convenient, especially to those who must support a system, whether it be right or wrong. It has always been the spirit of intolerant churches to anathematize free inquiry, and to maintain that there is far more merit in implicit belief than in serious investigation. But such is not the spirit of

the gospel. It desires us "to prove all things;" and by what means are we to prove any thing but by its own appropriate test—a question in morality by the laws of ethics, and a question in divinity by the words of the gospel? "Beloved," says John, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Impostors, and false teachers, and sincere advocates of erroneous doctrine, have abounded in every age of the church. Now we are admonished by the apostle not to trust every one who pretends to come in the name of Christ, but to examine his pretensions, to try, by an evangelical touchstone, whether the coin which he comes to circulate is composed of the refined gold of gospel truth, or of a base metal of his own coinage, impressed with a stolen image and a forged superscription. In this, and in all similar examinations, we must be guided by that understanding which the Deity has given us. Revelation bestows no new faculty; it only proposes for our adoption new doctrines, of the excellence of which we are to judge by the faculties which we already possess. We are to discern by the light that is in us, whether those doctrines are worthy of the origin from which they are said to spring,—worthy of God, the all-wise, beneficent Father, and calculated to promote the virtue and happiness of his intelligent offspring. We must lay it down as a first principle not to admit any article of belief which impeaches the

wisdom, the justice, or the goodness of the Deity, though it should be announced by an angel from heaven. We are to receive no tenet repugnant to reason or destructive of natural religion; because in this case we should virtually admit that God destroys with one hand what he created by another. The house would be divided against itself, and consequently unable to stand.

Were reason not constantly employed in the interpretation of the Scriptures, we should be involved in the most incredible absurdities. They speak of the Deity as invested with human passions and corporeal organs. Now, what monstrous conceptions would be hence deduced, did we not employ the judgment to discriminate between literal and figurative language—did we not understand, for instance, that the arm being the organ of strength, and the eye of vision in man, when ascribed to the Deity, are expressive of his omnipotence and omniscience! Some would say that the poverty of language obliges us to employ terms of sense to express our ideas of intellectual objects. But it may be less of necessity than choice, since no terms express more strongly our intellectual ideas than those which are taken from sensible images. When we ask with Job, "Hast thou an arm like God, or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" or, when we say with Nahum, "Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet;" or, with Isaiah, that "he measures the

waters in the hollow of his hand, that he weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance,"—we place before the imagination a sublime picture, which represents our idea of the power and majesty of Jehovah more forcibly than it would be possible to represent it in any terms destitute of such imagery. Every person of common sense must know that all such terms and images are employed only because they are analogous to the intended idea, as depicting certain operations in the providence of God, in some respects similar to those which would be effected by the instrumentality of those corporeal attributes which he is figuratively said to possess. But if they were understood literally, as the Anthropomorphites are said to understand them, into what egregious errors would they lead! Then, instead of entertaining the grand conception of Solomon, "that the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him," we should limit the supreme, eternal, omnipresent Mind to a local habitation, and ascribe to him a human form, earthly passions, and bodily infirmities, than which it seems impossible to form a more degrading notion of that blessed Spirit whom our Saviour has taught us to worship in spirit and in truth, unless we adopt the popular belief that he actually became incarnate, rendered himself subject to human infirmities, and suffered and died upon a cross!

Nothing is more common than for theologians to draw largely on the acknowledged ignorance of man

and the natural imbecility of his intellect when they wish to establish doctrines which shun the light and refuse to submit to the test of examination. They assure us, with much gravity, that we cannot explain how some of the most common phenomena in nature are caused, and that, therefore, we ought to prostrate the understanding and place implicit faith in the mysteries which they are pleased to recommend. One of the most celebrated of modern divines prepares the way for our adoption of an inexplicable doctrine in the following terms:

"When contrasting the ignorance of a creature so beset and limited as man, with the amplitude of that infinite and everlasting light, from the confines of which the message of revelation hath broke upon our world, we count it our becoming attitude to listen to all its announcements, even as with the docility of little children,—when, more especially, in profoundest darkness as we are about the nature and constitution of the Deity, who, throned in the mystery of his unfathomable essence, pervades all space, and without beginning or without end unites in his wondrous being the extremes of eternity, we hold that one information of himself (the Word was God), and from his own authoritative voice, should rebuke and bid away all human imaginations,—when, placed, as we are, in but a corner of that immensity which he hath peopled with innumerable worlds, with nought to instruct us but the experience of our little day, and nought to guide our way to that region of invisibles which is all his own—we, surrendering each fond and favourite preconception of ours, defer to the teaching of Him who is the fountain-head of existence, and whose eye reaches to the furthest outskirts of the universe that he has formed. And should he but tell of him who was made flesh, that he was in the beginning with God, and that he was God, surely on a theme so vastly above us and beyond us, *it is for us to regulate our belief by the very letter of the communication;* and on the basis of such an evidence as this, to honour the Son even as we

honour the Father, is the soundest philosophy as well as the soundest faith."

We applaud the truly Christian temper in which Dr. Chalmers has discussed the subject of the sermon from which we have taken this quotation.* But we deem him unfortunate in the selection of a passage of sacred writ, on which, he says, "*it is for us to regulate our belief by the very letter of the communication*, viz., 'the word was God.'" The expression is highly figurative. The original admits of various interpretations, and the most eminent divines have disagreed as to their exact import. But many texts might have been quoted by the learned doctor, which not only bear but require to be understood by the very letter, and which subvert from its foundation the hypothesis respecting what he calls the "Godhead of the Saviour" (Christ), an expression abhorrent from the language of Scripture, and which he thinks may be established on a solitary metaphor of John! Unitarians regulate their belief by the very letter of the following communication from the mouth of Christ himself, "My Father is greater than I;" and they perfectly accord with Dr. Chalmers in believing that Christ is "the fit representative, the *best expounder* of that embassy which has come from the dwelling-place of the Eternal, on an errand of charity to our world." They will not,

* The Effect of Man's Wrath in the Agitation of Religious Controversies: a Sermon, by Thomas Chalmers, D. D. Glasgow, 1827.

they dare not, dishonour a plain, positive declaration like this, so far as to set it aside in honour of any human theory; for they "honour the Son even as they honour the Father," and receive his communications as emanating from the mouth of God himself. We retort the argument founded on man's ignorance with overwhelming force upon our adversaries, and desire to know wherefore they, with all their innate corruption and blindness and prejudice, presume to proceed a step beyond what the gospel has clearly revealed. Wherefore do they speak of essences, and substances, and hypostases, and incarnations, and trinities, and triunes, and unetrines, and god-man, and man-god,—subjects of which the Scriptures contain not a syllable? What monstrous audacity is this! The Scriptures tell us repeatedly that God is one, and in terms so clear, so strict, and so guarded, that it excites our special wonder to see how men torture its meaning, and decry reason to favour chimerical fictions.

From our advocacy of the use of reason, it might, perhaps, be supposed that we are under a necessity of employing it for the special purpose of supporting our peculiar opinions, in opposition to the literal declarations of Scripture in support of another system. But no supposition could be more erroneous. Our belief is no obscure deduction from obscure premises, but founded on "the very letter of the communication" made by the gospel. We are well assured, indeed, that every just process of ratiocination leads

to the conclusion which we have formed, but we require no supplement to the first commandment to convince us that God is one; or that the apostle uttered a truth worthy of all acceptation, when he wrote, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things;" and again, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus." These texts have not their meaning couched under a metaphor. They are intelligible to the humblest understanding, and when those who uphold the doctrine of the Trinity produce texts from Scripture equally plain in favour of their hypothesis, we shall deem it worthy of consideration; but until then, we should "count it *their* becoming attitude to listen to those announcements" of Christ and his apostle which have been just quoted "with the docility of little children," lest haply they be found to fight even against God, by setting up imaginations of their own, founded on inferences from texts that are obscure and liable to be misunderstood. For, some of their most able advocates have been reduced to the necessity of acknowledging that the Trinity is altogether *an inference*, and therefore are they who maintain it convicted of not only using, but of grossly abusing, that reason against which they declaim; and ill does it become them to censure and accuse of impiety and god-denying heresy, those who do not embrace their inferences in preference to the positive doctrines of holy writ. We maintain as firmly

as the most zealous Trinitarian, that God and Christ are one. But he, without the smallest authority or semblance of a reason from Scripture, maintains this of their metaphysical essence, of which he knows nothing, and of which revelation says nothing; we, of their unity of counsel or design, the only sense in which the words are intelligible or expressive of an important truth, and which is demonstrated, as clearly as any proposition in mathematics, to be the true meaning, by our Saviour's praying that the disciples may be one with him, as he is one with the Father.

Were it on a subject less serious than religion, it would afford no small entertainment to see the efforts of theologians and polemics to write or to speak down reason; struggling, as it would often seem, against the innate convictions of their own minds; viciously arguing against the use of argument, and labouring to support by clamour and dogmatism a mass of doctrinal corruptions which totters under its own weight. It would be amusing to witness their subterfuges to escape from the shafts of common sense, and the horns of their own dilemmas; their noise and their smoke; their enigmas and their sophistry; their clouds of words and rotatory evolutions, continually spinning round the same circle, and never advancing a step nearer to the proof. In other subjects, if a man utters contradictions, combats the evidence of the senses, or the axioms of science, he exposes himself to ridi-

cule and loses all the respect which might have been paid to his opinions. But such vagaries excite no kind of surprise in theology. This is a field in which no one can betray too adventurous a spirit of knight-errantry. Not only are the grossest inconsistencies attempted to be reconciled, but whole volumes are written, with such ingenuity that we cannot help lamenting that their authors were not more usefully employed; to overthrow some of the plainest truths of Scripture, or to establish the most bare-faced contradictions; for instance, that there is no merit or virtue in good works, though they are so frequently enjoined by Christ and his apostles; that there is nothing damnatory in creeds which affirm as plainly as language can speak that there is no salvation for those who do not embrace them; and, to complete the climax, that three are one, and one is three!

One of the most pernicious consequences of the rejection of reason in the interpretation of Scripture, is the triumph it affords to the enemies of Christianity. Well may they exclaim against such a system as refuses to be tried by the only test to which they are willing to appeal. Well may they reject a revelation which they are taught to believe is at variance with all the principles of thought and of action which the God of nature has bestowed, which they find incapable of being understood without some new modification or new faculty of mind, and which demands not only the prostration,

but in some instances, it would seem, the extinction, of the understanding to secure a blind credence to the dogmas of its expounders. No wonder that men of whom such requisitions are made, and who have been taught to identify Christianity with the fooleries, superstitions, and antichristian doctrines of some of its professors, should turn from it with dislike, and, through sheer ignorance of its genuine character, reject it as the fabrication of priestcraft, militating against all the dictates of nature and conscience. But let it be exhibited to them in its true shape, in the garb of simplicity in which it was first arrayed, uttering the sublime truths of God, and teaching as the Saviour taught; then will the sceptic cease to doubt, and the unbeliever, from being an enemy, may be converted into a confiding friend.*

* "If unbelievers are ever to be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth, it must be by proposing it in that plainness and simplicity with which we see it taught in the Sacred Writings. It has been the insisting on irrational doctrines and unscriptural modes of faith as *necessary* to *salvation*, which has produced that infidelity we so often hear complained of. For the representing, as the word of God, what appears to be unworthy of its divine Author, is the only way to make the truth itself rejected, on account of the corruptions which are said to be a part of it.

"Whatever, therefore, renders religion more rational, renders it more credible; and an appeal to the reason and understanding of mankind for the truth, excellence, and purity of the gospel precepts, would do more towards recommending them to their belief and practice, than all the creeds and articles that ever were devised, not to convince, but to puzzle and perplex them."—Sermons by George

Should it be asked whether that very reason, of which we advocate the necessity, does not sometimes lead men astray; we reply, that right reason never leads men astray more than right religion; they are twin stars shooting their light in the same direction, and guiding to knowledge, virtue, happiness, and immortality. The intensity of the one light is increased by being blended with the other; both are weakened by separation. We do not, therefore, maintain that the one light is by any means sufficient. We do not set up reason as an all-accomplished and infallible guide. But this we affirm, that reason and religion are never in opposition; they never point to different paths, nor utter a contradictory language, nor come to adverse conclusions. They are friends and allies which ought never to be separated. The truths of religion are corroborated by the deductions of reason, and the probabilities of the latter are rendered demonstrable facts by the revelations of the former. We deny not that religion has explored her way to regions where reason could not have preceded, though able to follow. Inspired by the spirit of God, she has soared to the highest heavens, and thence descended to earth amidst coruscations of moral and intellectual light, with tidings of grace, and promises of

Rogers, A. M., Rector of Sproughton in Suffolk, and late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Lon. 1798, p. 47.

It is cheering to read such sentiments as these from a member of the church established by law.

pardon and hopes of salvation to man, to cheer, to instruct, to sanctify and conduct to the highest perfection of his nature. She has dispelled the mists which hovered over the future world, and opened a glorious vista beyond the kingdom of the dead, and unbarred the portals of heaven, and, with trumpet-tongue, proclaimed the rewards of obedience and the triumph of the just. "Blessed are our eyes, for they see, and our ears, for they hear," such sublime truths as could never have been discovered by the light of nature, and which many kings and prophets would have rejoiced to hear! But we must listen to her communications with understanding, and when we would follow her in her soarings to worlds of bliss and glory, we must take reason as our guide, or we may be misled by faithless phantoms of imagination far from the upward path; and instead of mounting to the calm and bright abode of truth, we may be plunged into dark clouds of mystery, and made the sport and the prey of the wracking whirlwinds of fanaticism, bigotry, and all unholy passions. Behold the unhappy being who is thus misled. The light which was in him is turned to darkness, and how great is that darkness! He becomes that which nature, much less revelation, would never have made him, a bigot and a pharisee, with all his views of heaven and earth, of God and his operations, of revelation and its blessings, confused and distorted. Instead of regarding God as a being of unchanging and in-

effable love, as the all-wise, beneficent, universal Parent, wielding the elements of nature, and disposing all things by the fittest means to the noblest ends; he considers him as the friend of an elected few, arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, and unjust, and as capable of inflicting punishment on men for deeds performed thousands of years before they were born, of laying aside the immutability of his nature, of becoming incarnate, and clothing himself with all the infirmities of his creatures. His views of man correspond to those which he forms of the Creator. Him he regards as an exile from his native inheritance, a wanderer among the ruins of a spoiled and deformed creation, the predestinated victim of wrath and perdition. He exalts faith at the expense of good works, and while he denies all merit to the practice of every Christian virtue, thinks salvation to be achieved by belief in a few mystical points of doctrine; and all these monstrosities of opinion he endeavours to support by texts of Scripture, of which he not only misunderstands the meaning, but with marvellous obstinacy rejects the light of reason, the only light that would lead him to their right interpretation.

Much sophistry is frequently employed to shew that because religion unfolds to us such revelations of the Divine Will as no human ingenuity could ever have discovered, we are therefore obliged to adopt certain articles of faith which put to shame every moral and intellectual principle of our constitution. But though it be admitted that revelation does un-

fold to us such truths as are not discoverable by the light of nature, we contend that they are never in opposition to reason. No religion from God, though it be above, can ever be against, the light that is in us; it may elevate, but can never prostrate the understanding; it may plume the thoughts as with angels' wings to soar to heaven; it can never deprive us of that faculty by the loss of which we should be reduced to a level with the brutes. If, therefore, any doctrine repugnant to its exercise or subversive of its principles be proposed for our adoption, we should not hesitate to reject it as false; no matter by what arguments or misapplied quotations from Scripture it be supported and adorned; for we may depend on it, that it involves some error or sophism, and that it emanates from the father of lies, not from a God of infinite knowledge, rectitude, and truth.

Some Protestants seem to act on the presumption that there is great merit in implicit belief; and that whatever danger may be in believing too little, there can be none in believing too much. But they act thus only in behalf of themselves, and of their own creed as opposed to others less prolix and incomprehensible, for they would be ashamed to have it thought that they ascribed any virtue to works of supererogation, or to a faith more ample and complex than their own. They blame the ignorance and superstition of those who follow a religion which can boast of more sensual rites and more profound mysteries than theirs. But let them keep

nearer home, and, laying aside their prejudices, candidly examine whether they may not be liable to the very condemnation which they pronounce. Will many of those opinions which they have been pleased to sanction or adopt, abide the test of reason or of Scripture, one tittle better than many of those against which they protest? Let them look to the argumentation of the Apostle Paul, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, on a subject not irrelevant to this: "Behold thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide to the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest, a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest, a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God?" In the same strain might we continue, Thou that *protestest* against certain doctrines, because they are irrational and unscriptural, dost thou advocate others which are equally destitute of a rational and evangelical foundation? Thou

that objectest to the erection of a standard of faith, deemed by the majority of Christians infallible, dost thou, notwithstanding, assume another which thou darest not affirm to be possessed of any such attribute? Thou who declaimest against the meaning attached to particular texts, and which can be proved to be erroneous by no arguments but such as reason supplies, dost thou reject every appeal to reason the moment it would expose the absurdity of some of thy own tenets? Is this generous? Is it consistent? You decry in one instance the very standard to which you are obliged to appeal in another; and when, by its rejection or admission, as suits your purpose, you have completed your system and stamped it with the name of Orthodoxy, you declare that it is the only safe guide to salvation, and that all who do not embrace it "hate the Lord Jesus in their hearts," and must perish everlastingly. You invade the sanctuary of man's conscience; you usurp the prerogative of the Most High; you snatch from his hand "the balance and the rod," and constitute yourself judge, in place of him whom God has ordained to be judge both of the quick and the dead! Is such conduct sinless? Shall he stand acquitted by whom such offence cometh? Let us look to it, brethren, and see whether that religion which is from heaven, and which allows unlimited scope to inquiry, is not most honoured when we most faithfully exercise the powers

of our minds so to understand the truths which it reveals that we may offer unto God a "reasonable service."

In an age when so many advocate the free perusal of the Scriptures, and, with an inconsistency not unusual in the history of theology, insist on the adoption of their peculiar doctrines, as those alone which can be safely embraced, I have deemed it my duty, beloved friends and brethren, to address you on the importance of exercising our rational faculties, and of pursuing our religious inquiries, with a view not only to the improvement of our own minds and hearts, but to the profit of those with whom we associate, and over whom some of us are appointed as ministers of the grace of God, to instruct, to direct, to stimulate, to assist in the right interpretation of the sacred oracles, and, above all, in "the formation of an elevated religious character." In understanding let us dare to be men, unawed by the fears of the world, unchecked by the trammels of system, unsilenced by the clamours of those who, with an arrogance of pretension which no free-born mind should brook, claim the knowledge and the inheritance of salvation as their own. There is a spirit at work which would root up all rational Christianity, and leave us nothing but fanaticism and folly in its place—a spirit, not like that of the gospel of everlasting truth, "a spirit of wisdom, of power, and of a sound mind," but of ignorance, self-conceit, and of a bewildered brain. This spirit, I

doubt not, has been busily employed in or about all our congregations—restless, teazing, and indefatigable; labouring to overturn the weak and lead captive the simple; decrying reason; substituting wild imaginations in place of common sense, and "giving over the mind to a strong delusion, that it may believe a lie." We ought to confront this evil spirit by a good one, armed in the panoply of divine truth, and wielding evangelical weapons with energy and skill. In proportion to the activity of the enemy should our activity be increased; for it avails little though the cause be the best, if it be feebly defended, or advocated with coldness. A bad cause prospers by zeal and ardour; the noblest must decline without the aid of such auxiliaries. Our cause, we trust, is the cause of Heaven. It is strong, not by numbers, not by patronage, not by influence with the world, but by its alliance with reason and the word of God. Notwithstanding, it demands our earnest endeavours. Truth is always opposed, and surrounded by so many enemies that she can make but small advances without the hearty co-operation of her friends. Her real friends are comparatively few, and therefore their exertions should compensate for want of numbers. Though each of us stood alone, he should raise his voice like a trumpet to shew Israel her transgression and Jacob his sin. While one spark of truth is left alive, there is a chance that the flame may be kindled. But if the guardians of the sacred fire suffer it to be extin-

guished on their own altars, how shall the sacrifice be consumed, or the incense made to ascend? The time was in Israel when strange worship usurped the place of the true, and the gods of the Amorites and of other idolatrous nations claimed the honours which belong only to Jehovah. But still there were some thousands who did not bow the knee to Baal. Still did there remain some priests and prophets of the living God to preserve and restore his religion; and the time at last arrived when idolatry departed never to return. We ought not to be discouraged because our numbers are comparatively few. Remember the admonition of our Lord: "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Great numbers, therefore, are not always a sure indication either of the truth or the strength of a cause. With many, it may be false and weak; with few, true and powerful.

As to numbers, with our principles, and with a religion founded on the pure word of God alone, without any commixture of human inventions—a religion that addresses itself both to the understanding and the heart, we cannot expect that they shall soon become multitudinous. I fear that the history of religion in all countries would shew but too convincingly, that the most erroneous creeds have al-

ways had the greatest numbers of votaries. Error misleads thousands, while Truth is uttering her oracles unheard. Error has a thousand high-ways and by-ways sloping and crossing and meandering down to her abode: the path to Truth is one, narrow and steep, and in many places to be surmounted only by a conscientious steadiness of purpose and elevation of mind. "I perceive," said the Apostle Paul to the Athenians, "that in all things ye are too superstitious:" and to what people might not a similar declaration be addressed? The language of passion, and the strongly-depicted terrors of superstition, will often prevail, when the words of sober seriousness, and the plain declarations of Scripture, are cold and unaffecting. Bold and enthusiastic declaimers well know how to profit by this weakness of human nature. They address themselves to the feelings and the passions. They expatiate against reason, and against all reliance on human understanding; and having established these points to their own satisfaction, they torture Scripture, and make it speak what language they please. They terrify men into a belief that it is dangerous to consult the dictates either of their own minds or hearts, for that the former are blind and the latter corrupt. Then may Superstition mutter her spells and begin her incantations. As the light that is within them grows dim, and the splendours of celestial truth are shut out, she trims her magic lantern, calls up her phantasmagoric monsters, and pours

imagery on smoke. The disciples are well pleased, and retire applauding the exhibition. But the religion of reason and the Bible disdains the arts of the sorceress. That religion would dispel the delusions of fancy, and teach men to see with their own eyes, to hear with their own ears, to judge with their own understanding. Accordingly, she affords less frivolous amusement, but more solid and permanent delight. She does not dazzle the senses, nor intoxicate the brain; but strengthens the judgment, and fixes the principles of inspired wisdom deep in the soul.

Those sentiments of charity and good-will which we think it incumbent on the disciples of Jesus to entertain for the whole family of mankind, as they prevent us from having recourse to those instruments of terror which some most dexterously employ, so do they also, it may be feared, disincline us from making an energetic use of the legitimate arms of our spiritual warfare. We allow to all the same liberty which we claim for ourselves, and believe that it is not by any standard of human authority, but by the righteous and unerring judgments of God, that we shall all be finally tried. Hence, while we avoid uncharitable denunciations, we suffer the ardour of our zeal to cool, and may perhaps ascribe less importance to sound principles of religion than they deserve. Unfortunately, knowledge and charity are not always in alliance with zeal. The most ignorant are often the most ardent; and zeal is found to cool as charity waxes ardent.

Being warned, therefore, of the evil, we should guard against it; and, attaching the highest value to the principles which we profess, advocate them fearlessly and indefatigably. "It is good," says the apostle, "to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" and what is so good as the truth, as the cultivation of mind, and a right understanding of Holy Writ? What so incumbent on us as the advocacy of those doctrines and principles which, we are persuaded, form the very essence of Christianity? I am far, however, from advising that we should commence a series of hostilities with those who call themselves the Orthodox; but that we should not suffer our principles to be maligned and misrepresented without reply or contradiction. We owe it to ourselves and our common cause to justify and defend them. Passiveness under a yoke only invites the oppressor to render it more heavy. Base spirits, instead of being softened by forbearance, only become more insolent, and the arrogance that would sink into pusillanimity by being boldly confronted, grows more daring when it dreads no opposition. Without provoking to the field, we may shew that we will not be driven from it. Like the apostle, we will "give place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel may continue with you." (Gal. ii. 5.) We will neither suffer our right to be invaded, nor our character traduced, by vulgar cant and fanatical declamation. We are admonished "earnestly to contend for the

faith once delivered to the saints," and, when occasion requires, may shew that we have not only strength to stand, but courage to assail; and that it may be less from want of power than of inclination, if we do not carry the sword of the spirit into the very heart of the enemy's camp.

I feel, brethren, that I have trespassed on your time and indulgence, and now hasten to a conclusion. If the pleasing persuasion which I entertain be not erroneous, that the sentiments expressed in this discourse meet your approbation, let us shew our sense of their value by acting under their influence. Be it ours to cultivate our rational powers assiduously, by study and reflection; in all religious questions to consult our own judgment as directed by the word of God and a conscientious love of truth. We are taught to employ our talents usefully and productively, and what talents are so valuable as those of the mind? "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge"—knowledge of God, knowledge of Christ, knowledge of nature and revelation—of the human heart and understanding—of good and evil—of the sources of happiness and misery—of all that can confirm our belief in the Divine mercy, enliven our hope, and expand our charity. We should pursue our investigations steadily, consistently, fearlessly, not only for our own benefit, but for that of our congregations, and of all with whom we converse, that we may impart to them some share of our success, instruct the ig-

norant, confirm the wavering, refute the caviller, and shame the "false accusers of the brethren." The Apostle Peter enjoins to be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" and it is desirable that all of us should follow this injunction; that we should not only know the principles on which we stand, but teach others to know and respect them; that we may silence the declaimer against us, not by reverberating his noise and wrath, but by strength of argument, mingled with the meekness of wisdom and the fear of God. We should manifest clearly that our principles are well grounded, and that if we differ from a large number of our Christian brethren on some important questions, our difference proceeds from no motives of which we ought to be ashamed; not from ignorance or prejudice, from party spirit or a sordid love of the world, a regard for fashion or desire of popularity; but solely from an unsophisticated love of what we believe to be the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. We should endeavour to make it known that the "reason of our hope" is such as all the art and ingenuity of man cannot satisfactorily prove to be erroneous; but that, being built on the solid foundation of Scripture, it can never be shaken or subverted.—Finally, let the light that is within us be kept always shining and well supplied with nutriment, that it may never become either feeble or flickering, but burn with a steady, inexhaustible

flame, guiding us through the dark labyrinth of human opinions, dispelling the gloom of mystery, with every dark vapour of the soul, putting to flight the demons of superstition, and conducting us to those regions of perfect day where doubt and error shall no longer cloud our intellectual vision. "Now we know in part and prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." We shall then see no longer "through a glass darkly," but have a bright perception of those objects which now puzzle our thoughts and perplex our reasonings. Thus shall the investigations begun here terminate in a happy conclusion, and our knowledge, like our felicity, be full and complete. That such may be the joyous fulfilment of our hopes and wishes, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Christ our Lord! Amen.

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T 93 1

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE SUPPORTERS

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 2, 1830.

BY

JOHN JAMES TAYLER, A.B.

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But true Religion, sprung from God above,
Is like her fountain full of charity;
Embracing all things with a tender love;
Full of good will and meek expectancy;
Full of true justice and sure verity
In heart and voice; free, large, ev'n infinite;
Not wedged in strait particularity,
But grasping all in her vast active spright:
Bright Lamp of God! that men would joy in thy pure light!

HENRY MORE's *Psychathanasia*, B. II. Canto iii. 6.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

A FRIEND of the writer's having pointed out to him, subsequent to the delivery of the ensuing Discourse, a remarkable coincidence between some of the views which he has ventured to express concerning the nature and value of the Scriptures, and the train of reasoning pursued in an article which appeared in the New England Christian Examiner for January 1830, and which has since been reprinted in a separate form by Hunter, London,—entitled, "The Scriptures the Records of Revelation, but not Revelation itself,"—it may be necessary to observe, that the views here exhibited are those in which the writer has felt himself daily becoming more confirmed, ever since his attention was seriously turned to the study of the New Testament, and that the following statement of them was composed and delivered before he had read or even heard of the article in question.

This circumstance would not have merited notice, might it not have been supposed that he had borrowed an important suggestion without due acknowledgment. The praise of originality he neither claims nor desires. Complete originality on a subject on which the minds of men have long been seriously exercised, might well be expected to involve both great presumption and serious error. His humble but earnest wish has been to serve the cause of truth. Where there is a free interchange of ideas amongst men,

a floating atmosphere of thought is set in action, the result of a thousand casual and mingling contributions, which exerts such an effect on every individual mind subjected to its influence, as renders it extremely difficult to decide, in regard to many of our most important views and opinions, what is original and what is borrowed. Truth, however, is every man's property; and whatever an individual deeply feels and sincerely believes, is his own, wherever it may have originated.

But since the prejudices against free inquiry on religious subjects in this country are so strong, that the best intentions are liable to misrepresentation,—

> *Cum genus hoc inter vitæ versemur, ubi acris*
> *Invidia atque vigent ubi crimina,—*

the writer cannot disguise his unfeigned satisfaction, that the views which appear conclusive to his own mind, as affording the best solution of the acknowledged difficulties of Revelation, have been sustained and corroborated by the concurring results of serious investigation, prosecuted in regions where religion, unfettered by the unhallowed restrictions of the civil power, appears in her noblést aspect; blending knowledge, intelligence, and philosophy, with a primitive simplicity of manners, and the cultivation of a piety at once ardent and rational.

London, June 14*th,* 1830.

A SERMON.

EPHESIANS II. 17, 18.

"*And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.*

"*For through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father.*"

WHAT is Christianity?—the unbeliever sarcastically demands, after enumerating the various and contradictory creeds of its professors. What is Christianity?—many a serious inquirer has asked himself, in weighing the difficulties and doubts, which always precede the attainment of sincere conviction. What is Christianity—what is essentially and everlastingly its own—and what is local, temporary and adventitious in the historical form, in which its spirit has been conveyed to us?—is a question which, however it may startle and offend the bigoted and uninquiring, the earnest and upright follower of truth will find it much easier to propose than to resolve. Even the adoption of the

great comprehensive principle, in which Chillingworth sought rest from the vacillations and perplexities of his early career,—That the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants,—will not wholly remove the difficulty for those, who are desirous of knowing, not merely what Christianity contains, but in what it consists. For the same documents furnish very opposite results to different inquirers; and, till something like a general standard of Christian feeling and principle has been ascertained, it is impossible to form a correct estimate of the present influence of the Gospel, or to judge what effects may be anticipated from its wider diffusion in the world.

Let us then take the New Testament simply as a collection of historical memorials; and, not embarrassing ourselves with the construction of obscure and insulated texts, but contemplating the actions and teachings of Jesus in their true light, relatively to the manners and opinions of his age and nation, let us attempt to seize the spirit and tendency of the Christian Dispensation, as it was originally promulgated by him. In the words of the text the distinguishing features of his religion are beautifully delineated. The spirit of the Gospel is comprised in two words,—holiness and love. Its one great object is, to bring all men to God as a Father; to destroy moral evil as the only bar to reconciliation and union with him; and to breathe into those hearts, that have turned to its invitations

and been renewed by its influences, an affectionate zeal to communicate the blessing, and to produce in others the same change of heart and life, which they have experienced in themselves.

As it came from the lips of Jesus, it proclaimed an universal brotherhood; it abolished all national distinctions; it recognised the whole human race under one character, as the sinful but freely pardoned children of God; it preached peace to all men, to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh; it made known to them one spirit, one Mediator, one God; it admitted all on one footing, through one change, to the hope of one heaven:—faith, holiness, brotherly love, immortal life,—these were its blessed elements; its tendency was universal peace; its object, everlasting happiness.

Such were the teachings of Jesus; such the mode, in which he spiritualized the religion of his forefathers, and developed the vast idea, which the influences of Heaven could alone have suggested to his mind,—of annihilating the distinctions which had hitherto separated the Jew and the Gentile from each other, and of bringing under one faith and one hope, gathering into one fold under one shepherd, the humble, pure-minded, and benevolent, among all the nations of the earth.

Influenced by their Master's spirit and example, the first Christians were a peculiar people, zealous of good works, united to each other, and devoted to God. Their creed, plain, simple and unambiguous,

was not sought out of books: it came to them from the deep convictions and in the living eloquence of faithful missionaries, and was occasionally strengthened by the written exhortations of an Apostle. It was a bond of union, and not an occasion of discord. All who forsook the abominations of idolatry, and worshiped one God,—all who sought forgiveness through faith in one Mediator,—all who looked forward to the same everlasting reward,—were brethren, united by closer ties than those of the world, drawn into a holy and tender sympathy with each other by a participation in earthly sufferings and in heavenly hopes.

Unhappily, this state of things did not long continue. In the course of a few centuries, nothing became more characteristic of a Christian church than a passion for invidious distinctions and arbitrary exclusion—distinctions concerning the most trivial points of doctrine, and exclusion for the minutest differences of opinion. The spirit of the Dispensation itself, which, as we have shown, was that of free mercy from the Supreme Father, and of universal love between man and man, was often lost sight of altogether, and confounded sometimes with its visible institutions, and sometimes with a system of doctrines derived from too rigid and literal an interpretation of the writings which record its origin and attest its divinity. In this confusion of Christianity with what is extraneous to itself,—with either its secular institutions or its historical documents,—

we discover a fruitful source of error, a most powerful cause of the perversion and contraction of its spirit.

Some people seem to have no idea of Christianity but as it exists in certain books. The true seat of Christianity is the human heart; and these books, or rather the doctrines and influences of which they are the vehicle, are but means, under Providence, of calling its spirit into action. The Scriptures are invaluable, as faithful records of the origin of Christianity, as the depositories of its truths, as the only safe channel of its pure tradition, as a standard for its teachers, and as a check upon the innovations and encroachments of time; but they are certainly distinct from Christianity itself—from that change in the moral condition and religious views of mankind which accompanied the Dispensation, and which might have existed—which did, we know, for a considerable time continue to exist—without the assistance of any written word. We may consider the Scriptures as intended to prolong the impression of the preaching of Christ and his Apostles;—an impression that might have died away, or become enfeebled in the vagueness and uncertainty of oral tradition.

What once flowed from the tongue and passed into the ear, is now fixed in the letter and addressed to the eye: but the eye now, as the ear formerly, is but a passage to the heart: the letter is valuable only as it points to the spirit, to the heart: and in accordance with that great law of Providence, by

which one class of human beings are continually employed as instruments in humanizing and enlightening the rest, the letter of Scripture would to this day be deprived of its most beneficial effect on the mass of mankind, were it not blended with an oral Christianity, which applies the spirit, as it is apprehended by the understanding and experienced in the heart, to the actual wants and present duties of society.

The Dispensation of Christianity appears to have suffered in its influence on mankind from two opposite causes;—from the concealment of the Scriptures during the ascendancy of the Church of Rome, and from the misconception and injudicious application of them subsequent to the period of the Reformation. The effects resulting from these causes form two remarkable crises in the history of Christianity; which are the more deserving of notice, as they may serve to point out the source, to which we must look for the revival and ultimate diffusion throughout the earth of the pure religion of Jesus. In the first of these crises we see the spirit of the Dispensation buried under the weight of its secular institutions; in the second, extinguished by a minute and scrupulous interpretation of its historical records: and in both we perceive Christianity identified with what is really distinct from itself, and is but a mode or a means of its existence.

The first serious blow that was struck at the vitality of the Gospel, was its establishment by the

civil power. By this act a sort of compromise was effected between Heathenism and Christianity, in virtue of which the former renounced its title, but retained a portion of its power. Previous to this period, though many corruptions both of doctrine and of practice had begun to prevail among Christians, the great number of sects and the ceaseless conflict of opinions had occasioned a perpetual reference to the authority of Christ and his Apostles, which put some check on exclusion and intolerance, and kept alive the original spirit of the Dispensation. But the secular establishment of Christianity took from it the most essential of its qualities,—its free spirit and its popular character: it was no longer the religion of the poor,—it was no longer the profession of a society recognising each other as brethren and equals.

The few and simple institutions, which had hitherto been maintained as a means of applying and distributing its moral influences, changed their character when touched by the sceptre of the Imperial convert, and became the ensigns of power and the badge of worldly distinction. From this time, with exceptions occurring in individual cases, we may trace the gradual submersion of the vital energies of Christianity in its external forms. Uniformity of doctrine and discipline was more rigidly upheld, in proportion as an increase of temporal strength supplied fresh means of enforcing it, till Christianity ceased to have any visible existence but in

its appointed ritual and outward institutions. The change was completed by the gradual disuse of the Latin tongue. On the formation of the modern European dialects, the Scriptures continued to be read, and the services of religion to be performed, in a language which the great body of the people could no longer understand. The result was inevitable:—as the Scriptures were not known, and the Gospel was lost in the Church, the elements of a rational piety could not exist, and the world was divided between superstition and infidelity.

At length the Reformation broke forth: and, viewed in reference to the times when it occurred, the Reformation must ever be regarded as one of the happiest and most glorious events in the history of Christianity and of mankind. It struck off many of those shackles which had hitherto restrained the free use of reason on the most important subjects, and delivered the Bible to the world as a noble theme for the exercise of its newly awakened faculties. But the true value and importance of the Reformation are overlooked or misstated by those persons who recognise in the language of its promoters—entitled as they undoubtedly are to the gratitude of posterity—an example for Christians of the present day; who venerate the creeds of that age, as embodying the permanent spirit of the Gospel; who look upon the Reformation as a boundary rather than an approximation; who consider it as having at once placed Christianity on its

right basis and in its just light, instead of viewing it as a step—grand and majestic, it is true, but still only a step—towards the final and yet remote attainment of the whole spiritual liberty of the Christian Dispensation.

Among the most signal benefits of this great revolution, we must number its total rejection of all traditional authority; its unsealing the word of God, and throwing it open to all mankind; its procuring the translation of the Scriptures, and freely circulating them throughout society. But if, in the enthusiastic piety and self-denying zeal which these causes excited, we find much to love and revere in the characters of the early Reformers, to an excess of the same spirit—an excess which the very circumstances of the times rendered almost unavoidable—we must trace many of the errors and extravagances which sully the lustre of their virtues, and more especially that intolerance and persecution, which a recent historian has but too justly designated as "the deadly original sin of the Reformed Churches*."

In consequence of having long been denied the free use of the Word of God, and compelled to submit to the authority of tradition and a temporal Church, those who were not restrained by an awe of the civil power from carrying the impulse of the

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* Hallam's *Constitutional History of England*, vol. i. p. 130, 8vo edit.

the elucidation of the truth ; and though the minds of the individual advocates may be injured by their professional habits, to the public the ends of theological justice may be finally obtained. But while the contents of the Bible have been eagerly discussed, its nature and character, though a preliminary topic of inquiry, have been little proved ; and notwithstanding many scholastic distinctions between different kinds of inspiration, it yet remains to be argued, whether the sacred writings are literally inspired at all. This point has hitherto, with singular unanimity, been taken for granted, and erected into an essential : it has been regarded as an inseparable element of a faith indispensable to salvation. Hence have resulted not only the vast mischief of untenable claims in behalf of the Scriptures, and a meagre appreciation of their real perfections, but a retardation of almost every species of knowledge which exercises the human mind. The Bible being regarded as a depository of all knowledge, its chronology, its physics, its logic, its pneumatology, even its Judaical institutions, were conceived to be faultless. This very error, which for ages sustained the faith of witchcraft, is at present occupied in combating physical science with the cosmogony of Moses, and extinguishing the philosophy of morals by the tradition of the fall.* What science has it not embarrassed ! Through what a host of difficulties, amid what a

* See Note B.

storm of hostility, had geology to struggle into existence! With what countless absurdities of speculation was it long encumbered, what incredible distortion of facts! And all, that the dates of the Old Testament might remain intact! And what has been the result? At length it is discovered that revelation is not interested in shewing that the globe has been created only 6000 years; and, as if to rebuke the narrow spirit that dreads the investigation of nature, as if to shew that the Creator is glorified by all knowledge, geology, while it has afforded no help to Deism, has given a fatal blow to Atheism. It has proved that the human species is a recent and sudden creation, and has not existed for ever, or been moulded by the gradual operation of merely material laws. It has laid distinctly bare to us the time when there was not a man on the earth: and thus, science itself has introduced us to the solemn moment, when the most magnificent and enduring of God's works was emerging fresh from the cloud of his power; when that most complex and delicate of organizations, the human body, and that most mysterious and beautiful of creations, the human soul, first stood erect beneath the heavens and on the earth, and drank in the spectacle of their glories. Astronomy, too, notwithstanding the noble elements it contributes to our conceptions of the divine infinitude, has not been permitted to make its discoveries unquestioned; and Newton's philosophy has been

In the prevalence of this rigid and literal principle of Scriptural interpretation,—this subjugation of the spirit to the letter of the Bible, which naturally resulted from the reaction of men's minds at the time of the Reformation, and which impressed its peculiar character on the mode of theological, and even in some degree of philosophical, inquiry and discussion, during the course of the 16th and 17th centuries,—we recognise the second of those crises, through which, as it appears to me, the history of Christianity has passed.

We have not, however, in reviewing the general influence which it has exerted on our manners, institutions, and literature, any reason to regret its occurrence. To this cause we must ascribe the reverential feeling associated with the sacred volume, so generally diffused through society, and that spirit of earnest and serious attention to religious

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but also as to his outward form, (unless the same words have different significations here and in ch. v. 3, *Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image,*)—and if God habitually assign to himself the members and form of man,—why should we be afraid of attributing to him what he attributes to himself, so long as what is imperfection and weakness, when viewed in reference to ourselves, be considered as most complete and excellent whenever it is imputed to God?"—*Milton on Christian Doctrine,* ch. ii. p. 18.

The translator conceives that the paragraph immediately following this sufficiently qualifies the apparent grossness of its meaning: but the whole passage will serve to illustrate the embarrassment in which Milton felt himself placed by his system of literal interpretation.

truths, which has had its effect even on the freest speculations of our most sceptical writers, which has led our most distinguished philosophers, with very few exceptions, to ground their systems of morals, politics, and social œconomy on the fundamental doctrines of a God, a providence, and a future life, and which has imparted to our general style both of writing and of conversation a tone of feeling and sentiment that is essentially religious and Christian. With the progress of time, the harsher principles of the early Reformers and their Puritanical successors were softened down under the mellowing lights of civilization and philosophy, and made to blend more harmoniously with the form and hue of the actual state of society.

The misfortune was, that, when manners changed and opinions and views became more liberal, creeds and formularies were retained; and established modes of phraseology on religious subjects still continuing in use, after they had ceased to be a faithful expression of inward belief, the language of devotion lost that delightful air of simplicity and deep conviction, which it always possesses when it comes warm and fresh from the heart, and often degenerated into a formal and unmeaning cant. To this day, and among those who have professedly renounced the authority of creeds, some traces of this want of accordance between language and inward conviction, this superstitious clinging to the letter, without a due appreciation of the true and living

spirit, of the Gospel, may yet be found lingering among the less desirable of the remote results of the great impulse of the Reformation. Some excellent persons seem to imagine, that the religion of Jesus—that religion which speaks to the heart, and only lives in the heart—can have no existence but in the superseded forms and phrases of antiquity; that the world can be rendered Christian only by the reproduction of the age in which Christ appeared *.

This prejudice—for a prejudice, and a very injurious one, it seems to me—is fostered by the vague conceptions which the generality of mankind entertain of the nature and value of the Scriptures. The titles by which they are most commonly designated, Word of God, Divine Revelation, Rule of Faith and Practice, though applicable to them in the best of senses, when their origin and authority are properly understood, have certainly the effect, in the vague manner in which they are usually applied, of leading many minds to regard the whole Bible as a

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* Freer scope must be allowed, within the limits of those primary truths, which are absolutely essential to religion and morality, for the indulgence of individual varieties of opinion, before the spirit of devotion can be cultivated with that depth and earnestness of conviction, without which it has neither beauty nor power: "Sic est faciendum," says Cicero with his usual correct feeling, "ut contra universam naturam nihil contendamus: eâ tamen conservatâ, propriam naturam sequamur; neque enim attinet repugnare naturæ, nec quidquam sequi quod assequi nequeas."—*De Officiis*, I. 31.

system of casuistry for the regulation of every thought, word, and action, a great receptacle of rules and precedents for the decision of minute points of faith and conscience; and to believe that, whenever a single text can be adduced, either for or against any particular practice or opinion, the authority of God is as clearly ascertained on that point, as it would be by the general tenour of the Scripture teachings; and that, consequently, any further discussion of the question must be condemned as impious.

The obvious consequence of this scrupulous mode of interpreting Scripture is, that different readers draw the most opposite conclusions from the instructions of the same book; and yet each is quite positive that his own interpretation bears with it all the force of divine authority. Can we be astonished that unbelievers should object, with considerable appearance of reason, to the divine origin of a religion, the doctrines of which are liable to such diversities of construction, and must of course be to numbers the occasion of so much error? "To the Law and to the Testimony" is the favourite motto of Protestant writers; but it is in many cases a very insufficient direction, till we have been previously furnished with some fixed and definite principle for ascertaining what the Law and the Testimony actually teach.

The circumstances which I have now stated, and which, I conceive, must have suggested difficulties

to every reflecting mind, seem to show very decisively, that the great Protestant principle of acknowledging the Bible only as a rule of faith and practice,—though it involves essential truth, though it limited the ground of contention among Christians, and was a glorious advance towards the ultimate development of pure and vital Christianity,—has now produced all the results of which it is capable in its present vague and indefinite form; that it is inadequate to the present wants of the religious world and the present state of religious opinion; and that a new crisis in the history of Christianity is at hand, when the attention of men will be directed from mere verbal and textual controversy, to a more earnest search and faithful application of the eternal principles and unchanging spirit of the Christian Dispensation.

Those who have been educated in the principles of a particular religious system, and accustomed to regard as Christianity, not only the fundamental truths originally taught by Christ and his Apostles, but also the practical inferences and applications, which have been deduced from those truths, and blended with them by the experience and observation of Christians in successive ages, will often experience some disappointment, when their studies are first seriously turned to the Scriptures, at not finding them more abundant in particular rules and precepts immediately serviceable to the present wants of life, and discovering that the several texts, which

they have been used to consider as the Scriptural authority for the various articles of their creed, have not at first view that obvious relation to the subject which might have been anticipated, and are, moreover, scattered up and down amidst a diversified mass of historical matter and incidental discussion.

These are difficulties which I presume all must have felt in the commencement of their religious inquiries: and for the removal of them, what explanation can be offered? In what light must we be taught to view the Scriptures? Nothing, surely, is further from their true character than a system of ethical and doctrinal instruction. Were we to say that the books of the New Testament are a collection of historical fragments, we might be misunderstood, as each separate writing is complete by itself: but viewed in relation to the great body of writings, historical and controversial, which the apostolic age produced, and to the existence of which the preface of Luke's Gospel bears decisive testimony, they are only remnants, which time has preserved for us, and which the discriminating knowledge and judgment of antiquity has stamped with its sanction, as possessing indubitable tokens of authenticity. They exhibit extracts of our Lord's discourses, glimpses of his actions and character, and specimens of his history. They contain abundant evidence of the spirit of his teachings, of the tendency of the Dispensation which he came to establish, and of the great

facts of his death, resurrection, ascension, and spiritual influence, which formed the main subjects of apostolical testimony after his removal from the world: but it is equally evident that insulated texts and detached passages cannot be quoted from them, in the manner they frequently are, for the decision of modern controversies and for the minute regulation of our opinions in the present day.

This will be still plainer, if we consider the medium through which the instructions of the New Testament are conveyed to us. It is a Jewish history of a Jewish reformer, specially raised up by God for the purpose of fulfilling in his person a previous train of prophecies, of carrying into full effect the provisions of a long course of preparatory dispensations, and of introducing amongst men, by direct authority from heaven, those great and eternal principles of religious belief which the subsequent arrangements of Providence have been gradually diffusing, through various agencies, over all the earth.

The history proclaims its own authenticity in its exact correspondence with the manners, language, and modes of thinking prevalent in Judæa at the time, when the events which it records are stated to have taken place.

The example of the first preachers of the Gospel conveys a very instructive lesson to us. They spoke directly to the moral wants, to the feelings and opinions, of the age in which they lived. They

would have been less powerful and efficient preachers of the truth, had their modes of representing and enforcing it been less Jewish. The very same circumstances which enabled our Lord and his Apostles, in conjunction with their miraculous agency, to produce such wonderful effects in preaching to the people, unavoidably occasion embarrassment and obscurity to us, who read, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, under all the influence of our modern metaphysics and inherited prepossessions, what, at the time of its delivery, found a ready interpretation, and a no less ready application, in the existing state of public opinion.

If it should be thought extraordinary that we are thus compelled to work our way to the truth through the medium of Jewish idioms and Jewish ideas; let it be recollected that by this means a salutary exercise of the intellect is involved in the pursuit of moral and religious improvement; and that on no other conditions, without a perpetual miracle, could we have possessed the same evidence of the historical truth of Christianity.

By all these considerations I am confirmed in the inference which I have already drawn, that our great object must now be, to separate from what is purely historical and adventitious, the essential truths of the Christian Dispensation; to draw them into all their consequences; to compare them with the actual phænomena of nature, providence, and society; to point out the beautiful harmony that

subsists between the works and the word of God; and to apply the pure spirit of the Gospel, in the sincere and hearty love of truth, liberty, and righteousness, to the improvement of individuals, the guidance of public opinion, and the reformation of social usages and institutions.

The truth of Christianity may be demonstrated in two ways; either by reverting to the evidently miraculous circumstances under which it arose, or by alleging the no less satisfactory proofs that offer themselves of a divine origin in its present adaptation to our moral wants, and its striking coincidence with all the more prominent indications and analogies of our moral being. To enter into the full force of either of these proofs, and to revive amongst men, as the present juncture imperiously demands, the vital power and influence of Christianity, we must endeavour to acquire a distinct conception of what Christianity really is. Under these circumstances, two duties seem especially incumbent on us: 1st, A freer investigation of the historical sources of Christianity, with a view to estimate the just force of Scriptural phraseology, and to establish an universal principle of Scriptural interpretation; and 2ndly, A more earnest and faithful cultivation of the moral and devotional spirit of the Gospel, in its influences on the heart and character.

From confounding the two perfectly distinct provinces of the biblical scholar and the Christian

teacher; from not separating sufficiently the practical application to present scenes and duties of the spirit of the Christian Dispensation, and the critical investigation of the books which authenticate its divine origin, much inconvenience has resulted, and much zeal been misapplied.

It must be obvious to every one who has reflected on the nature and tendency of religious controversy, as frequently conducted in the present day, that the parties engaged are destitute of common premises, and consequently can never arrive at a common result*. One person receives every sentence and every word of every book of Scripture as of equal value; so that to his mind one single text, clearly expressed, carries with it as much authority as the collective weight of the general tenour of Scripture testimony: another feels himself entitled to make great allowance for the force of Jewish idioms and the influence of Jewish ideas in qualifying the meaning of particular passages, and especially in favour of his own views, without, however, having in his mind any very clear and definite conception of the extent to which that allowance ought to be made. Is it not evident, that, while such differences of opinion exist, the subject

* On the great variety of contradictory opinions to which an unenlightened interpretation of Scripture has given rise, and on the proper method of obviating these inconsistencies, a very excellent and instructive passage may be found in Search's *Light of Nature pursued*, vol. v. p. 532.

under discussion has yet to be defined? The external relations, the origin, character, and composition of the sacred books have yet to be examined with a firm and fearless spirit of criticism, that has of late years, in this country, rarely been applied to them by serious and good men, in order to establish some common and intelligible principle of interpretation for the decision of those controversies which still continue to vex and harass the minds of Christians.

Many individuals, who allow the greatest latitude of opinion and freedom of inquiry within the limits of the sacred books, appear to shrink with aversion from that searching and fearless investigation of their origin and history, and of the influence of accidental circumstances in modifying their language and character, which the success of similar modes of criticism in the general elucidation of antiquity would justify us in applying to them; as if it were an irreverent impiety, that threatened to sap the foundations of revealed religion. Yet this process must be rigidly conducted before we can well ascertain what the Scriptures are, and decide in what manner we must interpret them. Till this previous question has been settled, all minute discussion of doctrinal points is premature and preposterous. The true reverence of God, in this case, is to search for the truth with the utmost care and seriousness, and with a mind purified, as far as possible, by prayer and self-examination, from all bias and preposses-

sion; and, in this spirit, to determine to receive nothing as the word of God, or as a record of the word of God, but what can satisfactorily be shown to be so.

The only effectual remedy against this mistaken notion of reverence for the divine will is to be found in the complete and unconditional acknowledgement of the principle, that error *purely mental* never can involve a moral transgression. Till this principle is fully admitted, there can be no free and impartial discussion; no removal of difficulties and doubts; no clear discovery of the entire truth. Such discussion never will take place, and, consequently, the lurking scepticism of many ingenuous and intelligent minds never will be completely dissipated, so long as the slightest error on certain subjects is branded with the infamy due only to a crime. Can there, indeed, be any discussion without error? Perpetual ignorance, an eternal stagnation of opinion, is the penalty of this intellectual cowardice, this fearfulness of involuntary error. Who can be certain, previous to examination, that the most serious errors may not be involved in what is implicitly submitted to as a truth too sacred to be disturbed? Errors of varying shape and hue are but the successive phases of opinion, before it assumes the full-orbed brightness of truth. There can be no truth without discussion; nor discussion without variety of opinion; nor variety of opinion

without partial error: preliminary error is therefore the condition of ultimate truth.

This important principle does not seem to be sufficiently kept in view by Christian advocates and disputants. Partaking in the general feeling of the sinfulness of intellectual error, their object is too often rather to defend what is established, than to exhibit what is really borne out by evidence; and hence they are sometimes betrayed into a want of candour and honesty, which cannot be too strongly condemned. Nothing is more common than to find them proving one thing, and then assuming another in the premises of their subsequent reasonings. The unwarrantable leap that is occasionally made from the authenticity to the inspiration of the Scriptures is a striking example of this. No historical facts are capable of more satisfactory proof than the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament; and from these premises the divine origin and authority of the Christian Dispensation may with the greatest clearness be deduced: but when, without any notice to the unwary reader, the notion of inspiration is covertly insinuated, as if involved in the foregoing proof of the credibility, and an attempt is thus made to fix one uniform character of divine authority on every sentiment and expression of the sacred books, which prohibits, as impiety, a free investigation of their origin and composition, and the consequent adop-

tion of a rational and consistent principle of interpretation,—a species of fraud is practised on the reader's understanding, which is utterly at variance with good faith and any intelligible feeling of reverence for the Author of truth.

It would be curious to compare occasionally the statements and assertions of the same writer, when arguing with an intelligent and candid unbeliever, and when enforcing his own views of Scripture doctrine on some dissentient fellow-Christian,—the concessions obliged to be made in the former case, and the assumptions so boldly maintained in the latter.

For the prevention of these inconsistencies, and for the establishment of such common principles as may ultimately lead Christians to an agreement in essential points, no method can be adopted but that of candidly and impartially studying the Scriptures in the very same manner as all other ancient writings; applying to them the same free and fearless spirit of criticism; judging of them, without any preconceived opinion, solely by their internal phænomena and their external evidence; and bringing to bear, on their interpretation and elucidation, a more full, accurate, and enlightened knowledge of the language, antiquities, manners, opinions, and general spirit of the age when they were produced.

This is the business of the biblical scholar: but all this learning and research are not necessary either for believing or preaching Christianity. For

the mass of human beings, the decisive evidence of Christianity will always be found much less in books than in the witness of their own hearts, in their deep consciousness of the wonderful adaptation of its great doctrines of repentance, faith, reconciliation with God, and participation in the hope of immortal life, to the wants and the weaknesses of their moral nature, and to the daily repeated testimonies of observation and experience. To apply these doctrines earnestly and affectionately, and to excite in men's minds that spirit of holiness, humility, and love, which they are fitted to produce, is the appropriate function of the preacher: and when he can point out to the awakened hearts and consciences of his hearers, how completely it was the one great aim of the preaching and example of Jesus Christ to revive and cultivate this spirit in the degraded souls and perverted institutions of his countrymen,—when he can make them see that this was the predominant tendency of his teaching, this the main object of the Dispensation which he came to establish,—he will have done more towards inclining them to listen favourably to any arguments that he may advance on behalf of the divine authority of Christianity, than he could have accomplished by a series of the most acute and ingenious proofs addressed abstractedly to the understanding alone.

The labours of the biblical critic are subsidiary to those of the preacher. They place at the command of the preacher those just views, those en-

lightened principles of interpretation, which enable him to clear away the textual difficulties of the New Testament,—to disengage the essential spirit of Christianity more effectually from its historical envelopment,—and to apply it, in its purest form, to the reformation and instruction of society as it actually exists. Aided by the improved means and accumulating materials of criticism, which are continually leading to such important results in the general elucidation of antiquity, the researches of the retired student, if properly directed, must from time to time enable him to throw new and increasing light on the origin and history of Christianity; which light, as soon as it has assumed the fixed and steady brightness of truth, is justly appropriated by the preacher, and, diffused by the agency of his popular eloquence through society, is thus gradually mingled with the general mass of the illumination of the age.

The office of theology has been sometimes said to consist in showing that the Scriptures have nothing to do with the business of life; as if its object were not to build up and confirm, but to disperse and destroy, the faith and hopes of mankind. The fact is, that for centuries after the Reformation such ignorance generally prevailed of the true mode of interpreting Scripture, and so monstrous were the doctrines founded on a literal construction of its phraseology, that it was necessary to break the pernicious spell in which men's understandings were

bound, by fixing their attention, in the first instance, almost exclusively on the great dissimilarity of the circumstances in which the words were originally uttered, and those in which they continued to be applied. We cannot condemn our predecessors for performing faithfully and fearlessly the peculiar duties which the circumstances of their times devolved on them. For us, a task of a different description remains,—that of positively applying and practically enforcing those great moral doctrines, which stand prominently forth on the pages of the New Testament, as the essential truths of Christianity: and our success in fulfilling that task will be greatly promoted by our keeping more distinct than perhaps was possible for our forerunners, the provinces of criticism and of preaching; reserving the former for the closet, as a preparatory means of exercising and disciplining the mind to put forth all the energies of the latter in the pulpit.

A careful observer of the times can hardly resist the persuasion, that religious controversy has, in this country at least, almost reached the limits, which are as yet attainable with our existing means of criticism and interpretation. Nothing is so wearying and unsatisfactory to the earnest inquirer after truth as that eternal warfare of texts, in which frequently everything seems to be assumed and nothing proved. Bigots on both sides are exceedingly positive; and arguments for the thousandth time repeated are hurled to and fro without pro-

ducing any other effect than that of confirming the prepossessions of those by whom they are advanced. What is the consequence of this?—Early prejudice is shaken; doubt and hesitation are roused; an intellectual excitement plays around the mind, which may indeed be useful for a time, and is certainly better than the dull stagnation of indifference: but something more than all this is wanted to produce a firm and active faith, to lay strong hold on the inward and spiritual man, to alarm the conscience and agitate the heart.

Divines whose attention has been much devoted to controversial pursuits are apt, from their professional bias, to over-estimate the degree of interest, which the mass of society—that immense mass which has yet to be enlightened and redeemed by the living influences of the pure Gospel—can ever be induced to feel in the comparison of texts, or in the dry discussion of critical difficulties. Arguments depending on the nice distinctions of words, or the laboured construction of some obscure phrase, they can with difficulty be made to comprehend; and he, that with such weapons should endeavour to reform the world, would bestow his labour in vain. What we want are not the withered ethics of our Presbyterian forefathers, nor the verbal and textual criticism of our more immediate predecessors; but the practical application to manners and opinions as they exist, of the vital spirit of the Gospel, imbibed in deep and earnest meditation on the charac-

ter and teachings of Christ, and breathed forth again on the dull and slumbering souls of men in the sweet and searching tones of gentleness and love *.

When we charge individuals with an alienation from religion, we should ask ourselves, whether it be not, in some cases, only an alienation from the manner and the spirit in which religion is too often inculcated. They feel estranged from discussions which seem to terminate in nothing conclusive, and in which the very terms most frequently in use have never been clearly defined. Their understandings are bewildered, and their hearts are not soothed and satisfied. They feel the want of that moral grandeur and pathos, at which the soul of man relents;—they find not in their teachers that illumination of the *heart* †, which intuitively discerns the wants, the weaknesses, and the woes of a fellow-being, and imparts its consolations with a tenderness and a discrimination which no pride or sophistry can resist. Instead of acquiescing in the great general principles of the Christian Dispensation, and practically applying them to the actual condition of mankind, Christians have been unpro-

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* Of the good that may be effected under the most unfavourable circumstances by an earnest, judicious, and practical application of the spirit of Christianity to the actual condition of society, one of the most striking and interesting examples is to be found in the recently published Memoirs of Oberlin, a Protestant clergyman, pastor of Waldbach in the Ban de la Roche.

† πεφωτισμένοι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας.—Ephes. i. 18.

fitably busy in framing out of the Scriptures a minute and accurately defined system of faith, to which every one's conscience was to be compelled to conform, and to which every text in the Bible, every incident, illustration, and allusion in the Evangelical history, must be made to contribute a direct and positive testimony. Hence the hardness, the artificial precision, and generally unsatisfactory character, of all theological systems. As no form of Christianity has yet appeared, against which some passages might not be adduced from the Scriptures, which it would be difficult, in our present state of knowledge, to reconcile satisfactorily with the distinguishing articles of its creed, the obvious inference is, that we should cultivate a spirit, not indeed of indifference, but of caution and charity; and, following honestly what is plain and clear in the instructions of the New Testament, should leave in the obscurity in which we find them those texts, and there are many such, which history and criticism have not yet furnished the means of completely elucidating.

Happily the vital spirit of Christianity is affected by none of these difficulties. The light of God's truth, having once been kindled in the world, cannot be extinguished by the partial obscurities of books. The great doctrines of a merciful Creator, a paternal providence, the universal brotherhood of the human race, the necessity of holiness to divine acceptance and heavenly bliss, the chastening and preparatory

character of the present life, followed by an immortal existence, where moral evil shall be for ever exterminated by a more striking manifestation and a completer development of the retributory principles of the Divine government, and where the children of earth, redeemed from misery and sin, shall pursue an endless career of improvement and happiness, —these doctrines find their strongest support in the inward approbation and assent of every pure and virtuous mind, and exhibit a theory of the moral state and prospects of man, which carries its own proof in the clearness, simplicity, and exactness with which it explains the most striking phænomena of the world in which we dwell.

In whatever degree these doctrines are believed, felt, and acted upon, the sanctifying and saving influences of Christian faith are experienced; a faith, so completely in unison with the teachings of Nature as well as of Revelation, that all men may be urged to cherish it; a faith, which must survive the caprices of opinion, the transitory modes of fashion, and the perishing institutions of a nation or an age, because it is founded on that which time and vicissitude cannot destroy,—the permanent tendencies and essential qualities of the mind and character of man. Creeds may perish, opinions disappear, and the whole face of society undergo a complete revolution; but man and nature, and that divine will which created both, cannot change, and the truth, which is built on them, must be eternal.

It is probable, that all existing forms of Christianity will experience some modification with the increase of knowledge and the progress of society, and thus approach nearer to each other and to the truth. Meanwhile, it is some presumption in favour of Unitarian Christianity, that, while it excludes all articles of belief that are founded on obscure and doubtful interpretations, it comprises as essential those doctrines, which are most clearly taught in the New Testament, which are the latent source of vitality to the most orthodox creeds, and which are confirmed by the strongest testimonies of the heart, the conscience, and the life. To promote the cause of truth and virtue, in this purest form of Christianity, is the object of our assembling together this day. May our labours and our zeal tend constantly to the one great end of making all men brethren to each other, and of finally substituting for those invidious distinctions which now harass and divide the world, the single and all-comprehensive denomination of Christian!

So long, however, as our peculiar creed is calumniated and attacked, let us not be deterred by a false moderation and a mistaken charity from lifting up our voice in its behalf, and from maintaining in its defence the most sacred of interests,—the cause of mental independence and religious freedom, and the right of every human being to think and speak for himself.

Upon this last plea, fellow Christians, I must rest

my own hope of forgiveness, for the length as well as for the freedom with which, in the presence of so many older and wiser men, I have now ventured to express myself. I can only say, that I have endeavoured to act upon a principle, which, if universally adopted, would tend above every thing to the discovery and promotion of truth,—that of delivering frankly and unreservedly what are, after some reflection, the sincere and deliberate convictions of my own mind. Conscious of this, I humbly commend what I have now uttered to the favour of Him, who accepts the upright intention in place of the perfect performance, and renders ultimately subservient to truth and righteousness even the errors and the ignorance of his children. What, indeed, are the opinions of an individual, but diminutive links in the great chain of universal mind! a light ripple on the surface of some heaving wave, itself rolled onward by the ocean-tides, that are obedient to an influence more powerful still!

Delightful and consolatory belief! that, under the good providence of God, there can be no ultimate evil! that honest and upright endeavours to serve the cause of truth, however enfeebled by unavoidable imperfection, and perplexed with unintentional error, are accepted by the omniscient Judge of the human heart, who will never permit them to be wholly defeated of their effect and deprived of their reward! and that, however obstructed by selfishness, thwarted by folly, and opposed by superstition and

tyranny, the ultimate and universal happiness of the human race is safe with Him, whose power and wisdom are but the instruments of his infinite benevolence! "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"* Amen.

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* Isaiah xiv. 26.

THE END.

RICHARD TAYLOR, PRINTER,
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THE WORD MADE FLESH:

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL IN SOUTH PLACE, FINSBURY,

ON

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13th, 1832,

BEING THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BY

WILLIAM HINCKS, F.L.S.,

TUTOR IN MATHEMATICS AND PHILOSOPHY IN MANCHESTER COLLEGE, YORK.

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1832.

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TO THE

COMMITTEE OF THE

British and Foreign Unitarian Association,

AN INSTITUTION

WHICH, HE BELIEVES, IS GREATLY CONTRIBUTING TO PROMOTE THE KNOWLEDGE OF

PURE AND UNCORRUPTED CHRISTIANITY,

THIS DISCOURSE,

PUBLICLY ADDRESSED TO THE SOCIETY WHICH THEY REPRESENT, AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR DESIRE,

IS INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR FRIEND AND SERVANT IN THE GOSPEL,

THE AUTHOR.

MANCHESTER COLLEGE, YORK,

August 31, 1832.

A SERMON.

JOHN i. 14:

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

THE Unitarian doctrine, for promoting which amongst our fellow-christians, and, as far as we have opportunity, amongst all our brethren of the human race, as being the truth of God, alone fitted to satisfy the enlightened and inquiring mind, and to diffuse the best and purest influences of religion, the Society whose anniversary we this day celebrate has been established, is professed and maintained by us, not merely as being an intelligible, a rational, and a beautiful system of theology, but as being simply and truly the revelation which God has made unto us by Jesus Christ, and that which alone, by just interpretation and fair inference, can be derived from the writings of the New Testament.

We do not, indeed, pretend to find in the Scriptures no difficulties; we do not declare ourselves equally confident in our explanations of all the passages which are thought by many to be opposed to

our views; we do not represent ourselves as not needing, or as not interested in obtaining, farther light. But we are confident that ours is the doctrine which the unprejudiced reader would derive for himself from the Sacred Volume. We are aware of no objections to our system which are not greatly overbalanced by those which must be encountered in exchanging it for any other; and where we are least confident that we ourselves see the author's meaning in a passage which time and altered circumstances have rendered obscure, we are generally well convinced that the sense attributed to it by our opponents is altogether improbable and indefensible.

Our doctrine, then, is put forth and defended by us as a *scriptural* doctrine. We desire to learn of Jesus, whose claims to our reverent attention and unhesitating obedience we joyfully acknowledge. We open the records of his life, and the writings of his apostles, to inform ourselves who he was, why he was sent forth, and what should be the effects of believing on him. The result of our inquiries is the faith of which we make public profession.

If we were not strong in our own convictions, and deeply impressed by a sense of the importance of religious truth to the happiness of individuals and the improvement of society, we should not come forward as we do, inviting the attention of our brethren. As it is, we come forward with confidence. We ask, if they may be obtained, for candid attention and fair discussion; but even if

our principles are misrepresented, our motives calumniated, and the name of our honoured Master is refused to us in consequence of our endeavours to restore to his religion its simplicity and its power, still we will raise our voice, making what we esteem the truth to be heard wherever we have the means of proclaiming it. We leave the result, without anxiety, to an all-directing Providence, but our anticipations are such as must give animation to our zeal, and make our exertions and our sacrifices their own reward.

The passage of scripture which I have selected to introduce this discourse, and to which I would now request your attention, is frequently appealed to, as being in direct and irreconcileable opposition to our views.

Taking it with its connexion, it is, I think, agreed among the best judges on both sides, that it is the most important passage in the New Testament in reference to the controversy respecting our Lord's person. I cannot deny that it is attended with serious difficulty, yet I do not fear the result, in any mind, of a fair examination of its meaning. I should be presumptuous if I entertained the hope of affording full or general satisfaction by the remarks I shall now offer, in a case where I have seen reason to change my own opinion, and find myself differing from some of my brethren whose learning and judgment I hold in the highest respect; and on an occasion to which I cannot think that lengthened critical discussions would be very suitable. But it

may probably not be deemed an useless attempt to shew that, whatever uncertainty may remain respecting its true meaning, this text cannot with any justice be claimed by our opponents; and I likewise hope that in illustrating what I conceive to be its real sense, I shall be laying before you an important general view of the nature of the Christian dispensation, from the contemplation of which we can hardly fail to derive some advantage, and which will furnish us with an appropriate subject for our consideration on an occasion like the present.

When the text, in connexion with the opening words of the Gospel, is said to be opposed to our views of Christian doctrine, it is assumed *first*, that the *Logos*, or Word, is a personal name of Christ, and *secondly*, that this *Logos* is declared to be God in a strict and proper sense, and to be the Creator of all things. If either one of these assumptions is unfounded, the argument against us is destroyed: if either one is doubtful, it is considerably weakened, since then both have been called in question on at least plausible grounds; and since the doctrine which is supposed to be taught in the passage is, in our deliberate judgment, inconsistent both with the general tenor and with various express testimonies of scripture, we surely are abundantly justified, even before we have obtained satisfaction respecting the real purport of the Apostle's words, in deciding that they cannot be intended to convey the sense which has been generally attributed to them. He cannot

be supposed to contradict himself and the recorded words of his Master and all the other writers of the New Testament. Yet all this, in our belief, he must do, if he here affirms the absolute Deity of Christ. We acknowledge that this sort of reasoning would have little or no force if we were obliged to resort to it in many instances, but the number of passages of scripture ever produced against us by writers of any authority on our Lord's person, is by no means great, and among these there are few indeed respecting the just interpretation of which we can profess to feel the slightest hesitation. Having, therefore, nearly all the satisfaction which our minds are capable of receiving as to the general doctrine of the New Testament, we cannot help, and indeed we do not feel ourselves at all called upon to refuse, being influenced by it in our judgment respecting a passage which is attended with peculiar difficulty. We are often told that our interpretations are manifestly designed to serve a purpose. Where this reproach has any better foundation than the ignorance of the accuser, what is meant by it is probably no more than this, that we must be aware a certain text is commonly considered as supporting a doctrine which we, with the same motives that influence others for desiring to possess the truth, and with as strong claims as any of our brethren to be considered sincere and honest, have decided, from an examination of the Bible at large, to be false and unscriptural. We think, of course, that we have preponderating evidence against

its being really found in the text in question, and are disposed to look for some other sense than that which we know to be commonly assigned to it. Now I do not merely ask if this is not fair ; I ask how it could be otherwise. I would hope that we are ready to listen to argument. I think I may say that we have no desire, and can have in view no object, but to know and to diffuse the truth. But in each individual case we cannot, and we ought not, to dismiss from our thoughts all our previous judgments ; and if we meet with an instance of difficulty which appears to us rare, if not singular, we are entitled, as reasonable men, to prefer any plausible explanation in consistency with all that we think most plainly taught in other parts of the Sacred Volume, to a popular one which is opposed to our strongest convictions derived from the same book.

Thus much I have thought it right to say, not because the interpretation of my text which I would recommend to you, possesses any thing less than my own entire and cordial assent—not, certainly, that I do not immeasurably prefer it as a probable explanation of the author's meaning, independently, so far as I know my own feelings, of all controversial bearing, to that of our opponents ; but I wish it to be well understood why the differences existing among Unitarians themselves respecting this passage, do not affect the general scriptural character of their doctrine, or the soundness of their modes of procedure in using that volume from which alone a truly Christian faith can be derived.

I have stated that the introductory paragraph of the Gospel of John cannot be considered as opposed to the Unitarian doctrine, unless it be true, at the same time, that the *Logos*, or *Word*, spoken of is a personal name of Jesus Christ, and also that he is declared to be God in the highest and strictest sense. But how difficult is it for any one to believe at the same time both these propositions! If we consider Logos as a title of Christ, we immediately recollect, and may well suppose the Apostle to have recollected, the words of Jesus himself, that in scripture those *were called gods to whom the word of God came*. If, on the contrary, we understand the Logos to be truly identical with God, his *becoming flesh* seems to us sufficiently explained by the divine knowledge and divine power, the abundant proofs that God was always with him, which our Saviour manifested. This is indeed very much the way in which the phrase is understoood by those who object most strongly to our interpretations.* The interpretation which for some years past has been generally approved among Unitarian divines, grants that the Logos is a name of Christ, but denies that he is called God in the highest sense, and takes the words of my text as asserting, on the contrary, that he was truly no more than a

* They do not suppose the *Logos* to have been actually *converted* into flesh. This would be utterly inconceivable, and would not at all suit their doctrine concerning our Saviour, that he was truly man, as well as truly God. By *became*, or *was made flesh*, they, I believe, understand, was *thoroughly united to a*

man.* This explanation has been ingeniously and plausibly defended by verbal criticism, and, comparing the whole sense thus elicited with that proposed by the defenders of our Lord's Deity, and with the general tenor of scripture, I should feel myself obliged to admit it as the most probable; yet it does not seem to me to afford a very clear and satisfactory account of the Apostle's purpose in this remarkable introduction, and it labours under some verbal difficulties which I must fairly confess that I strongly felt, even whilst I assented to it, as upon the whole the best. It is besides, in my opinion, altogether at variance with the language of the early ecclesiastical writers respecting the Logos, and furnishes no clue for tracing the origin and progress of the errors which even at an early period prevailed in the church. The interpretation adopted by Lardner, Priestley, Lindsey, and Wakefield, identifies the Logos with God himself, and considers its becoming flesh as marking only the divine knowledge and power which constantly accompanied the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the supposition that *logos* is used in the sense of *reason*, and that the attribute of *wisdom* is particularly intended, may be erroneous, and may have prevented this interpretation from appearing to as much advantage in the

human being. The difference then is only as to the *kind* and *degree* of this union which are not explicitly stated in the words, but must be learned by other means.

* See Note A.

writings of the celebrated divines I have mentioned, as it did in the "Platonism Unveiled" of Souverain, who explains *logos* to mean any divine manifestation among men, an idea which has been revived, and learnedly defended, by one of our American Unitarian brethren, Mr. Upham, in his Letters on the Logos.* Chiefly as the result of the study of the opinions of Philo, of the early fathers, and of the various Gnostic heretics, I have been led to a conclusion not materially differing from that of Mr. Upham; and I cannot but expect that the effect of farther inquiry on the subject will be, a general disposition among us to receive, with some important modifications, that explanation of St. John's proem which has satisfied some of our ablest scriptural critics, and seems to have been universally adopted by the ancient Unitarians.†

It seems to me much the most probable opinion that the Gospel of John was written many years after the works of the other evangelists, and as the term *Logos* does not occur in them in any peculiar sense, and is not repeatedly and familiarly employed by him, I think we may reasonably suppose that his motive for using it was, its having been introduced and much employed by the more speculative Christians, who had derived it from the philosophy, Jewish or Platonic, or both, which prevailed in that age, and its having been connected with some dangerous errors which he was especially anxious to

* See Note B. † See Note C.

correct. "We may say with truth," (I quote the words of Dr. Burton, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, in his Bampton Lecture, for 1829,) "that between the genuine followers of Plato and the corrupters of his doctrine, the Gnostics, the whole learned world, at the time of our Saviour's death, from Athens to Alexandria, and from Rome to Asia Minor, was beset with philosophical systems, in every one of which the term Logos held a conspicuous place." Nor is this all: the Jews themselves, independently of the influence of Platonism, after occasionally personifying in the most remarkable manner the Divine perfections, had gone so far as to personify his *word*, meaning his *active energy*, the *manifestation of his power and glory on earth*, and had adopted the practice of ascribing to the Word of God, with more or less appearance of giving it personality, according to the circumstances, all his acts towards his creatures. This is what has been often remarked in the Targums; and it at length degenerated into a mere periphrasis for God himself, till at last the expression was even imitated in speaking of human beings; but the original purport of the phrase seems capable of being determined with sufficient precision, and we have an example of its use in the apocryphal Book of Wisdom, written probably two centuries before the birth of Christ, which is well deserving of attention. In reference to the destruction of the first-born in Egypt, an act which, in Exodus, is directly attributed to God himself, it is

said, "Thine almighty *Word* leaped down from heaven, out of thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction, and brought thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death, and it touched the heaven but it stood upon the earth." No one can so far mistake as to suppose that the *almighty Word* here means any thing different from God himself; and it is on the same principle that we find divine wisdom personified, not only in the book of Proverbs, but even more remarkably in the later books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. We have here, then, an early instance of that kind of personification of the manifestation of God among his creatures, which, encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of the age, and by degrees associating itself with some notions borrowed from Platonism, must in our Lord's time have become a familiar and generally intelligible mode of expression. Now, no opinion seems better established than that neither the Platonists, nor the early Jews, nor Philo in particular, meant by the Logos any thing different from God himself.* With all of them it was an attribute, or agency or manifestation, to which personal qualities were ascribed only in a figurative sense, according to a prevalent and well understood mode of speaking; and according to this approved mode of using the term, the Apostle should be supposed to have used it, until some

* See Note D.

strong reason is given for believing him to have assigned to it a new sense. According to a tradition, which there is no ground for questioning, and which is supported by internal evidence in his introduction of several other terms which were in use among this sect, St. John wrote his proem expressly against the Gnostic heretics.* We naturally inquire, then, what their notion of the Logos was? They belonged to the oriental school of philosophy; but though some of their dogmas might be of much more ancient origin, they certainly were corrupters of Platonism. They gave a sort of really distinct existence, it is difficult to say precisely in what sense, to the attributes personified only by the Platonists, and, by degrees, to a great number of qualities and notions which they called *aeons*—that word expressing an immutable and immortal nature. Among these *aeons*, *logos* held a conspicuous place: others were *life*, *light*, *darkness*. Whilst other Christians spoke of Christ as the *Logos*, or *Word of God*, the manifestation of his glory among men, the christianized Gnostics would represent the *aeon logos*, or, as some of them chose to state it, the aeon Christ, as distinguished from Logos, as having descended on Jesus. Some of them were led, by other opinions entertained by them, to deny that our Lord had any real human body, maintaining that his form was but a phantom, or that his body was of celestial materials. Now,

* See Note E.

what could be more natural than for the Apostle, adopting the established use of the term Logos, as identical with God himself—a mere personification expressive of his acts towards his creatures—whilst shewing how truly Christ was the Word of God, the oracle of his will, and the manifestation of his power and glory, to contradict the false and pernicious sentiments which he saw arising in the church, by declaring that the Logos was no separate being, no permanent emanation, but only God himself acting by the expression of his sovereign will—that the same word of God had created all things instead of there being, as was affirmed, a distinct creator—that it was the same which is *life* and *light* to men, instead of these also being separate aeons, and that its final and most important manifestation was in a real man, not, as was affirmed, a phantom or a being of a different order. According to this view, the object of the Apostle is clear, the peculiarities of his phraseology are accounted for. He uses the principal term in the same sense in which we have good ground for believing that it was employed by his contemporaries. Little difficulty or obscurity is left in the passage, and what there is may be attributed to our imperfect knowledge of the Gnostic tenets. According to this view, there is also, I think, a light thrown on early Christian controversies, which is otherwise desired in vain, and without which no probable account of the gradual rise and diffusion of what we esteem the

great corruptions of Christianity can be devised.* It is not in a public discourse that it is possible fully to unfold and justify the plan of interpretation of which I have given you the leading principles. If you should think it worth your serious examination, and should some of you be led to a reconsideration of the subject, my purpose will have been fully answered. You will now anticipate my explanation of the words of my text, "And the word became flesh." The Divine power and glory were fully and constantly manifested in the man Jesus. In all his words and actions it was evident that God was with him. In him we had the Divine word tabernacling among us, full of grace and truth. We beheld the glory which its residence conferred, such as could belong only to the peculiarly beloved Son of God.† The same sentiment is repeated in another form, in the 18th, as the substance of the whole proem: "No man hath seen God at any time. The well-beloved Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath made him known."‡

We must observe that this kind of language could not have been applied to former prophets. They conveyed some distinct messages from God,

* See Note F.

† It hardly need be explained here, that the term rendered in our Common Translation *only-begotten*, means peculiarly beloved, like an only son.

‡ See Note G.

and were enabled to prove their commission; but the communications they received were occasional —God spake to them, he did not dwell in them. There was, under the ancient dispensation, a shekinah or manifestation of the Divine glory, in a particular place, not through any person, and it was rather a means of impressing the conviction of his existence and his government, than of making known his moral perfections and the true nature of his dealings with his creatures. But whilst his miracles afforded continual proofs that the power of God always accompanied him, and justified the belief that he was authorized in all things to explain the will of God, the whole character of Jesus was so influenced by his constant intercourse with the Father, his habitual access to the fountain of purity and goodness, that he became the living representation of the moral attributes of the Deity, the perfect display in a human mind of those excellencies which command our love and veneration in the Supreme Being, and in the imitation of which, as far as our frailty will admit, our duty and our happiness consist. It is no part of the Unitarian scheme of Christian doctrine to bring down our honoured Lord as near as possible to the ordinary condition of human beings; to represent him merely as a prophet whose message was somewhat more general and important than that of his predecessors. We know that his was a peculiar case; that to complete the system of God's extraordinary dispensations; to substitute a spiritual and universal, for an ex-

ternal, limited, and temporary system, and to fit men for a course of progressive improvement, without any farther direct divine interference, it was necessary that there should be some manifestation of God's power, character, and dealings, of a nobler kind and better adapted for the clear expression of moral attributes than any which had hitherto been made. It was necessary that the glory of God, no longer displayed in splendour or in cloud, should be exhibited in works of beneficence, in words of wisdom, purity, and love; that to some human being the spirit should be given without measure, so that he might be, in purpose and will, *one with the Father, a reflection of his glory, and an image of his perfection*, and thus capable of conferring upon us the inestimable blessing of that acquaintance with our Maker, his plans and the way in which to seek his favour, which could never have been obtained from the observation of Nature and Providence alone. It is "*in the face of Jesus Christ that we see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" We bless his goodness that he hath so revealed himself; and believing that *to honour the Son is to honour the Father who sent him;* that to honour the Son in rational faith and sincere obedience is to have access in his name to the presence of the Father, we feel our Master's high dignity to be essential to our own religious hope, and are led by every motive which can influence the human mind to assign to him that pre-eminence upon which the peculiar benefit of his religion is founded. When

we are represented as degrading him, we are really only guarding the unrivalled supremacy of that Being whose glory is manifested in him, whom he himself honoured as his Father, and worshiped as his God, by adhering, as we think, to the plain sense of Scripture, and resisting the metaphysical subtilties of a false and now exploded philosophy.

God is a being inconceivably exalted above the comprehension of creatures such as we are. His infinite perfections the utmost stretch of our faculties will not enable us to understand. His transcendent glories, too dazzling for our feeble vision, are inacessible to mortal eyes. His power is inconceivable. His wisdom is inscrutable. Even his moral attributes, free from every shade of imperfection, every tendency to change, and every modification of feeling, whilst they are admired and adored, are too far exalted to engage the sympathies or awaken the affections of mankind in general. Hence the necessity there was for indulging in early times some anthropomorphitical notions, and founding the love of God rather on peculiar favours and privileges, than on the amiable qualities of his nature, and his universally diffused goodness.

Hence also the necessity, when it was time to abolish a system adapted only to the childhood of the human race, that God in giving us the information which we so much needed respecting the sources of our happiness and our high destination, should at the same time lead us to consider ourselves as bearing towards him a particular and

endearing relationship, that of children to a father; and, whilst he afforded us convincing proofs of his power and providential interference, should enable us to understand and feel his moral perfections in the way that would be most interesting and useful to us, by shewing the effect which the clear perception and constant contemplation of them would produce in a human mind. Jesus displays an image of the Divine excellencies, reflected with softened radiance, from the unstained mirror of a pure heart. By him we look, as through a medium tinged to suit the capacity of our organ of vision, on the glories of infinite perfection, divested of their dazzling power, but acquiring distinctness of form, and glowing with a beauty which captivates our affections. Will any one say that God is sufficiently manifested in his works; that no displays of his power can be more striking than those which are constantly presented to us in the heavens above and on the earth around us; that no proofs of his goodness can be desired more convincing than the beauty of his creation and the general happiness of his creatures; and that the ordinary course of his providence abundantly shews to every attentive observer that he is the approver and rewarder of virtue and the punisher of vice? We might in reply ask, by whom have the lessons of Nature and Providence, otherwise unaided, been distinctly read, and properly applied? Where are the instances to be found of those who, by these means alone, have become self-denying, beneficent, and pious? The

voice of nature is intended and calculated for our instruction, and they are happiest who most delight to listen to it; but, like other languages, it must be gradually learned before it is understood, and some assistance is required to enable us properly to interpret it. But we will answer farther, that when our impressions are strongest from the things that are seen of the being and perfections of their invisible Author, they are apt to be vague and inadequate; that though we may be impressed with general sentiments of awe and admiration, those affections towards our Father and Governor which it is most important that we should form and cherish, absolutely depend on there having existed some *intercourse* between him and his creatures, acquainting us with our real condition and prospects, and with his requisitions.

In the infancy of human society, what would man have become, without revelations suited to his capacities and wants? Could he have sustained his existence at all, or, had he done so, would his state have been much above that of the brutes? You might as well expect the new-born child to possess the strength and experience of manhood, as suppose newly-created human beings capable of contending unaided with the various labours and dangers of mortal life, and of distinguishing for themselves the evil from the good among the objects which attracted their desires. The kind of interference that was expedient varied with the progress of society, but Judaism was still a dispensation for

children. Its numerous rites and ceremonies were calculated to occupy the attention, where a spiritual faith would have failed to interest. Its pomp of external worship was fitted to impress a sense of the Divine presence and power on minds too gross to be instructed by the majesty or the beauty of nature. It was established amidst awful miracles, its laws were enforced and its sanctity upheld by terrible punishments. God was manifested suitably to the capacities of men, and in such a way as to promote their improvement He was in his holy temple, and they learned to honour and to serve him; but they gradually became capable of something above an outward and carnal service; they became capable of estimating and profiting by a spiritual and intellectual religion; they became worthy to be the depositaries of the most glorious truths, and to be brought under the purest influences of that religion which consists in piety, holiness, and charity, springing from the knowledge and the love of God, from filial feelings towards him, and the full assurance of his paternal care. Then "the Word was made flesh." Instead of a mere, unsubstantial human form, like those which represented to Abraham the presence of the Almighty talking with him for a little time and being seen no more, or that which ascended in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice; instead of the blazing bush of Horeb, the lightnings of Sinai, or the cloud which filled the tabernacles; the far more glorious manifestation of God was now by a man, who acted under his impulse, and

made known his will. In the miracles of Jesus, see the same power which ordained and upheld the laws of nature proving, in the only conceivable manner, its condescension to give needful light to our minds, by offering to our senses the unquestionable evidence of its extraordinary and supernatural interference! See a celestial glory made to beam from the head of him whose word stilled the stormy waves, restored to calmness the disordered mind, gave sudden vigour to the palsied limbs, and even called back the departed spirit to its tabernacle of flesh!

Consider the character of Jesus, his holiness, his piety, his benevolence, his zeal in the service of God, his sacrifice of himself through life and in an agonizing death for the good of his brethren of mankind, and what can you see but the effects of a peculiar intercourse with the Divine Being; the image of his holiness and goodness; the natural result of assuredly knowing, and, therefore, entirely trusting him? Would you see how perfect benevolence would make men act and suffer; how the most glorious and amiable of the Divine attributes may be transfused into human nature, and the love of God towards us may be proved and exemplified in the love shewn by him "whom he hath sent to bless us;" how the unalterable rectitude of the Divine nature may be imaged in the unshrinking firmness of a holy witness to the truth; and the heavenly mercy which is the hope of frail and sinful mortals may be beautifully copied in the generous forgive-

ness of the most cruel persecutors? Look to Jesus! study his life, contemplate his death, and if your hearts will let you, deny that in him God was with us! He was to us the voice of God respecting the principles which should regulate our conduct, and the glorious truths which should supply us with motives to the performance of every duty, with effectual consolations under every trial; and all that by divine authority he commanded and revealed, he illustrated and applied in his own life and conduct. By him, then, God has not only assisted the weakness of our powers by communications without which it is difficult to shew that man would ever have attained to the possession of the most important truths; but, what is even more essential, he has completed that direct intercourse between himself and his creatures, without reference to which, constituted as they are, it is scarcely possible that the religious affections should exist, and has made so beautiful a display of his character and moral attributes as most persuasively to invite their love and obedience, most effectually to lead them to that conduct and those dispositions which are the glory of their nature, the source of their real happiness, and their preparation for heavenly felicity.

"The Word became *flesh*, and dwelt among us." It is because our Lord was properly and truly a man, and in nature and capacities nothing more than a man; because he did not walk in the world as a being of a superior order, who condescended to assume the semblance of humanity, whilst he re-

mained really secure against its errors, indifferent to its temptations, and exalted above its weaknesses; but plainly shewed that he had the feelings and affections, the wants and the frailties of our nature, whilst he proved that he was enlightened by Divine wisdom, accompanied by Divine power, and in all things influenced by a perception of the Divine perfections, that we find the manifestation of himself which God has made by him so interesting and so valuable. We sympathize in his feelings, we understand his temptations, we learn the power of the principles which triumphed over them. We see that God was with him, in order that we may all be brought to God, that we may be made to feel his presence, to trust his kind care, to know and to fulfil his holy will. Our Master and Lord is our elder brother, our friend, and guide. Full of grace and truth is the word of God by him, bringing us properly to know, authorizing us to love, encouraging and assisting us acceptably to serve, our Father in heaven. These are the purposes of his mission, and only when these are accomplished in our own minds we shew that we indeed recognize *his glory* to be that of *the well-beloved Son of the Father*,—are assured that *no man could do the things that he did, unless God were with him*, and believe his declaration that *the words* he speaks *are not his own, but those of the Father who sent him.*

Such as I have represented it, following, as I think, the authority of Scripture, the Christian dis-

pensation contains nothing mysterious or unintelligible, nothing perplexing or revolting. It is the religion of nature and reason, rendered certain and efficacious by the immediate sanction of Divine authority, and exemplified in all its power and all its loveliness by the great Teacher through whom God was pleased to manifest himself. It is a religion, the connexion of which with the improvement of mankind as to their intellectual, moral, and social condition, is easily traced, and admits of the most satisfactory proof. It encourages the hopes, whilst it directs the efforts of philanthropy, gives animating views of the capabilities and of the prospects of human nature, and announces, as following in its train, civilization and prosperity, liberty and peace, knowledge and virtue.

I would not affirm that the religion of the blessed Jesus has ever been so corrupted as not to be attended with preponderating good, and I am well aware that many of its worst corruptions have been the characteristics of ignorant and barbarous times, partially modified and counteracted by the influence of those very truths over which they seem to triumph. Liable to error ourselves, it becomes us not to judge harshly of the errors of our brethren, and whenever they are serious and honest, (which we should not be easily induced to question,) they are entitled to our candour and respect. But all error is essentially evil; evil to those who entertain it, and to those who fall within its influence. If we see any thing

clearly ; if we read any thing correctly, (and we do know that we have formed a disinterested and faithful judgment according to the light we possess,) then the Gospel has been perverted through false philosophy, ignorance or fraud, and many of our brethren throughout the Christian world greatly mistake its true nature. Shall we possess the truth, which enlightens, consoles, and blesses, and shall we be content to keep it to ourselves ? Do we rejoice in our religion ? Do we imagine that we feel its power, and are we not ready to exert ourselves, that others may be sharers in our joy, and partakers in our edification ? Can we look to the condition of mankind at large, and see so many members of God's great family who have not yet attained to the happiness of knowing him ; and can we doubt its being a worthy object of our zealous and active exertion to open to them the door of faith, to bring them to know the manifestations of God's love, and to feel the influences of the glorious truths which we account our own best blessing ? Surely our hearts cannot be warmed with Christian charity, surely we cannot value Christian hopes and Christian principles, unless we desire, and endeavour to the utmost of our power, that what we believe to be the pure and simple religion of Jesus Christ, may be known to all our fellow-creatures. God will diffuse his own truth in his own way, and in his own time, but it is an honour and happiness to be employed as his instruments, and the love which

our religion enjoins is a commission from him which cannot be questioned, and ought to be acted upon with vigour and earnestness.

Let our meeting together this day animate our zeal in the glorious cause of truth and human happiness, and let no means be wanting for carrying on our good work which we can supply or procure.

NOTES.

Note A, p. 12.

This plan of interpretation was adopted by Socinus and his followers, and has of late years been defended with various modifications by Cappe, Belsham, Carpenter, Yates, and others, whose learning and judgment are deservedly held in the highest estimation.

Note B, p. 13.

At page 46 of this work, having stated in the text the general object of the "Platonisme dévoilé," as he had learned it from Vitringa, and observed that he had not himself seen the book, Mr. Upham adds the following note: "Since these letters were written I have been permitted, by the kindness of a friend, to look into the work here referred to, 'Le Platonisme dévoilé.' It was written by Souverain, and richly merits the good opinion of Vitringa, as well as the general celebrity it has obtained. It gives an interesting and ingenious account of the Logos of Plato and of St. John; and although it does not present, still it contributes much to illustrate and confirm, the view of the subject attempted to be set forth in these Letters." I quote this note at once to shew the independent character of Mr. Upham's investigation, and to prevent any of my readers from supposing that I attribute to him an exact or very close agreement with Souverain, but the point of agreement seems to me to be of primary importance, and I may be allowed to illustrate it by one or two extracts. "Ce qui nous montre que toute *manifestation externe*, soit par les *anges*, ou par la *chair* de J. Christ, est le *verbe* de Dieu, comme toute *communication interne*, soit par un ange, ou par une verbe immédiate, est le *S. Esprit.*" (Plat. dévoilé,

Chap. I., Véritable Idée du Verbe, p. 20.) "Il faut que nous remarquions ici, une bonne fois pour toutes, que le *Verbe* a ne le considérer que dans son *energie*, n'est autre chose que Dieu même; mais à le considérer en tant qu'il est une marque de la présence Divine, il est quelque chose sensible, une *voix*, une *lumière*, ou quelque forme extérieure, telle qu'on là vue dans les anges, ou dans l'homme J. Christ nôtre Seigneur." Plat. dévoilé, Chap. I. p. 24.

"We have already seen, that 'the Logos,' or 'Word,' was the general and final title affixed to these Divine appearances, or to the Shekinah."—"But Jesus Christ is called by John and other scripture writers, 'Logos' or 'Word.' So far as this title is appropriated to him, we are now able to explain it without any difficulty by referring to its several significations, as just stated. There is reason to believe, however, that he was 'the Word,' in a peculiar and pre-eminent sense. There seems to be evidence, that every former 'Word,' all previous Divine communications and appearances, were prospective, preparatory, and subsidiary to him, as 'the Word.'"—"In order to throw light on these texts, (1 Cor. x. 4; Col. ii. 17; Heb. x. 1,) and to obtain clear ideas respecting the manner in which every previous Shekinah or 'Word' was prospective and subsidiary to Jesus Christ, regarded as a Shekinah, or as 'the Word,' it will be necessary for us to take a comprehensive view of the whole subject of religion, or of intercourse and connexion between God and his human creatures." Upham's Letters on the Logos, Letter V., pp. 122, 123.

"The person of Jesus as an object of sight, and his language as an object of hearing, were 'the Word of the Lord,' in the same manner in which the pillar of fire, or the cloud, or the burning bush, was 'the Word of God,' and in which the visible signs or audible sounds of language are words of men. They are the constituted vehicles of the thoughts and purposes of God to us." Ibid. p. 133.

See also the detailed interpretation of the whole of St. John's proem in the VIth of these valuable Letters.

Note C, p. 13.

I here class together all those interpretations which, in any manner, identify the *logos* with God himself, and represent our

Lord to be so called only as being a manifestation of his perfections and will; and though I am very sensible of the importance of fixing precisely the meaning of the term, and of removing the difficulties which press against some interpretations belonging to this class, I must still consider the point in which they all resemble one another to be the principal one in the whole controversy.

The following passage from Justin Martyr (Dial. with Trypho, p. 358, A, *α*, *β*, Paris edition of 1636) is an early and remarkable testimony as to the way in which the Unitarians understood the Logos of St. John: "I continued: And do not you (sc. Trypho and his friends) think that I state these things again and again from diffuseness; but because I know that there are some who wish to preoccupy these things (to take for their own purposes the passages of scripture which he had been explaining) and to say that *a power from the Father of all*, manifested to Moses, or to Abraham, or to Jacob, is called an *angel* in its address to men, when, through it, commands of the Father are delivered to men; a *glory* when it appears in a vision of no definite form; but sometimes a *man* and a *human being* when it appears in the assumption of these forms, such as the Father wills; and they call it *Logos* when it conveys to men familiar communications from the Father. But they say that this *power* (or *influence)* is indivisible and inseparable from the Father, in the same manner as the light of the sun, when on the earth, is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in heaven, and when he sets is taken away along with him. Thus they say that the Father, when he wills, makes his power (or influence) to go forth from him, and when he wills, again withdraws it into himself." This is no doubt the mode of explaining these matters adopted by those of whom Justin elsewhere speaks, and whom, be it observed, he in neither place describes as heretics, who, "confessing Jesus" to be the Christ, declare him "to be a man born in the natural way." They acknowledged that God was so with him, that he was a full manifestation of the Divine perfections and will to mankind. They acknowledged that by that power or influence which accompanied Jesus, the great Father of all dwelt amongst us his creatures. Where there was an extraordinary exertion and display of Divine power, there, according to them, was the "word" (logos) of God. By it the

world was created; it also so accompanied the man Jesus that in him it might be said to *become flesh*, but, according to their notion, it was no distinct subsistence, any more than the flame in the bush of Horeb, or than they believed those appearances to have been which in the ancient scriptures are spoken of as angels. That Paul of Samosata, Photinus, and, in a word, all the early Unitarians whose sentiments on this point are mentioned by ancient writers, explained the *Logos* of St. John on the same principle, is too well known to need being here proved by quotations. There is, indeed, a sect mentioned by Epiphanius under the name of *Alogi*, who are reported to have rejected St. John's Gospel and the Revelations, if not all this Apostle's writings, and these being supposed to have been Unitarians, some moderns have inferred that the Unitarians of the second century generally rejected the works of John. We have, however, the most direct evidence to the contrary furnished by their opponents in the cases of all the distinguished leaders, and by much the most probable opinion is, that no such sect as the *Alogi* ever really existed at all. (Lardner's History of Heretics, Book II. chap. xxiii. Works, Kippis's edition, Vol. IX. p. 516.)

Note D, p. 15.

I cannot allow myself here to justify this assertion at large, but I will appeal to three authorities, altogether independent of each other, and each having considerable weight. 1st, Souverain, the learned and ingenious author of the Platonisme dévoilé, before referred to; 2ndly, Mosheim, whose opinions respecting both Plato and Philo will be found in the notes to his edition of Cudworth's Intellectual System; and 3dly, Dr. Burton, of Oxford, Bampton lecturer for 1829, Lect. VII., pp. 213, 214, where he delivers his judgment both with respect to Plato and Philo. I have endeavoured to illustrate the real sentiments of the last-mentioned philosopher from his own writings, in a review of Dr. J. P. Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Person of Christ, communicated to the Monthly Repository and Review, New Series, Vol. V. pp. 460—469.

Note E, p. 16.

I have read with care the treatise of the learned Tittman,

"*De Vestigiis Gnosticorum in Novo Testamento frustra quæsitis*," but he does not seem to me to have in any material point shaken the evidence which had been produced upon the subject. Let the reader of his work only consider that the question is not as to the time when the name *Gnostic* began to be used, but as to the existence and influence of opinions of the kind afterwards so denominated amongst some of those who early acknowledged the authority of Christ: let him remember that it is not only of no consequence that there never was a distinct sect of philosophers calling their system *oriental*, but that it matters not that the principles referred to cannot be proved to have been ever the characteristics of any school of philosophers holding themselves distinct from others; that it is abundantly sufficient if it appears, as can hardly be doubted, that certain notions and modes of thought long cherished among the pretended sages of the East, were before and about our Lord's time in union with a corrupted Platonism, producing much influence among those who pretended to philosophical studies in Asia Minor or Judea and Egypt, and were maintained by some who were led to receive Christ, thus causing the earliest corruptions of his religion. Let him bear in mind, as leading characteristics of this kind of philosophy, respecting the existence of which in that age he may inquire, the doctrine of æons or emanations, a low opinion concerning matter, and a belief that the formation of the world out of this corrupt mass was the work of a being different from and inferior to the Great Supreme; and it certainly seems to me, that thus viewing the question in its proper light, he will decide that the ingenuity of Tittman has been employed in vain.

Note F, p. 18.

It must, I think, be allowed by every one qualified to judge, that, granting the mode of interpretation here defended to be the right one, and making ourselves acquainted, by a perusal of the works of even a few of the early fathers, with the manner of applying quotations, the kind of reasoning, and the general habits of mind, which prevailed amongst these the more learned and philosophical of the early Christians, the way in which both what has since been reputed orthodoxy and what was accounted heresy might arise out of the simple truth, presents itself to us

with remarkable clearness, and a seducing appearance of being natural and probable. That those whose minds were filled with notions of aeons or emanations, should supppose the divine power which accompanied our Saviour to be one of these distinct beings, seems only what their philosophy would lead to as a matter of course; and among those who did not admit these extravagances, but perceived their inconsistency with the essential truths of the Christian religion, there was still much room for a mystical philosophy to exert its influence. In giving, according to the fancies of the later Platonists, a sort of distinct personality to the Logos, without allowing it to be really any thing different from God himself; in strongly expressing the principle that the Logos was manifested in Christ, and pressing to the utmost the union of the divine with the human being, yet without admitting that either was lost in the other, or deprived of its real existence. In perfecting the mystic triad with which Platonism had familiarised them, by considering the manifestation of God in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as, like the logos, emanating from him, and producing separate effects, yet not being really different from him, there was abundant scope for curious speculation and ingenious argument, with the prospect of alluring by such discussions those who had a taste for philosophical pursuits, whilst nothing could be more certain than that in treating on points of so much difficulty and delicacy, differences of opinion must arise; men would run into errors in their anxiety to avoid their contraries, and each successive period would produce a fresh and plentiful crop of what the ruling party would denounce as heresies. Who does not see how, in pushing the personification of the *logos*—the active energy of God manifesting itself in a special manner—only a little beyond what was contemplated by the Apostle, a sort of distinction is found between God as he was manifested in Christ, and God in his ordinary existence, whilst yet it could not be allowed, without abandoning the great principles of divine revelation, and falling into errors against which all the best of the early Christians jealously guarded, that two beings would thus be constituted; hence the necessity of maintaining the mystery of unity and separate existence at the same time. As soon as the *Logos* was regarded as a distinct mode of Godhead, and that mode which was manifested in the man

Jesus, it followed of course from John's language that the creation of the world must be attributed to it. The title '*Son of God*' belonging to Christ in consequence of the peculiar degree in which God was with him, would be judged to belong to his *divine* nature, hence the *Logos* would be at once *God* and the *Son of God*, and thus we obtain the expression *God the Son*. In the same manner may all the features of modern reputed orthodoxy, respecting our Lord's person, be easily traced to their source; and, in the numerous heresies which sprung up, we see the difficulties they created in the minds of reflecting men, quite as much as the ambition, obstinacy, or fanaticism of party leaders. I cannot refrain from here laying before my readers a striking passage from Father Le Courayer's "declaration of his last sentiments on the different doctrines of religion:"

"I believe that there is but only one God; that his Spirit is not a substance distinct from him: and that Jesus Christ, to whom divinity was very intimately united, is his Son in virtue of that union. This is all the Trinity that I find in the Gospel; and I cannot conceive that any other Trinity can accord with the Unity of God. I know that many ancient writers have had recourse to the multiplication of substances to give us an idea of this mystery; and others have imagined other systems, more philosophical than evangelical, that have less served to clear up this matter than to obscure it. But I distinguish these systems from that of the Gospel, and, inasmuch as I find this latter worthy of respect, it therefore appears to me little essential to adopt notions which often have much obscurity, and sometimes are even involved in contradiction.

"The Incarnation has nothing any more contrary to the Unity of God than the Trinity. Accordingly, it is extremely remarkable, that neither Jesus Christ nor his Apostles have ever represented to us these mysteries as including incomprehensible things, and which it was impossible to reconcile to reason. God, willing to draw men from their errors, and to purify them from their sins, filled Jesus Christ with his wisdom, invested him with his power, communicated to him his authority, and gave him his Spirit, not by measure, as to the prophets, but united himself so intimately with him, that Jesus Christ appeared in the form of God, that he was made Lord and Christ, Prince and

Saviour.—Thus God, referring every thing to himself, and not terminating in Jesus Christ, who is no otherwise regarded than as the organ and the instrument of the mercy of his Father, is always God alone who is the object of our adorations; and there is nothing that shocks us in conceiving that he can communicate himself to a man as fully and as intimately as he judges it necessary for his own glory, and for the salvation of mankind.—This is the explanation of that intimate union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, which, perfectly simple as it is, has so much divided all Christendom. From a willingness to find, in this intimate union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, all that we experience in the union of the body and the soul, we have been thrown into embarrassments and contradictions which it is impossible either to explain or to conciliate. We talk of hypostases, of personalities, of idioms, and of every thing that a dark philosophy could imagine, to render things credible of which it was unable to give us any notion. Some have made a ridiculous mixture of the divinity with the humanity. Others, in discriminating too nicely the difference, have seemed to place Jesus Christ only in the rank of ordinary prophets. Hence the Nestorianism, the Eutycheism, Apollinarism, and the Monothelism, which have excited such fatal schisms in the church, and which have perhaps as much favoured the progress of Mahometanism in the East as the ignorance of those nations, and the victorious arms of the Saracens."

Note G, p. 18.

As it may perhaps be expected by my readers that I should avail myself of these notes to lay before them a connected interpretation of St. John's proem, according to the principles maintained in my sermon, I offer the following as, in my judgment, expresing the Apostle's meaning:

Ver. 1. "In the beginning"—at the first, at the commencement of any thing recorded, or in which we are concerned, the sense being the same as in the opening of the book of Genesis, which may have been in the writer's mind—"In the beginning was *the Word*"—for we so name the active exercise of the Divine perfections, God's manifestation of himself by

works or communications. "And the Word was with God."—We may speak of him personally, as is customary, for such language is natural and well understood; but we must not suppose him to exist in any separate place, or to occupy any inferior station, as those have done who make *logos* one of several emanations having a distinct being. "And the Word was God."—He is even identical with God himself, and must never be thought of as having been in any proper sense different from him. Ver. 2. "He was in the beginning," from the very first, "with God."—It is necessary to repeat this sentiment in opposition to prevalent false doctrines, and I mean to shew how he was with God from the beginning, by pointing him out to you as his agent in the creation of the material universe, as well as in that new and spiritual creation of which I am now chiefly to speak. Ver. 3. "By him all things were made, and without him was not any thing made which is made."—The creation has been considered as the work of a being different from, and inferior to God; it has been represented as betraying either weakness or malevolence in its former, and some may be unwilling to admit that in all its parts it has proceeded from the Supreme God himself. Yet this I positively affirm; I admit no *demiourgos*, I allow not the God of the Jewish Scriptures to be distinguished from the great source and centre of all perfection. It was the Word, the power, the active will of God, by which all things were called into existence. Ver. 4. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."—There is here, I think, a sudden transition to the Apostle's principal subject, the Gospel and its influences, the connexion being maintained by the continued contradiction of leading Gnostic tenets. Life, he would now say, is not a separate being, one of the aeons, as it is represented in the false philosophy of the age, nor is light to be so considered, but all that is ever attributed to them belongs to God's Word alone. The doctrine of Life which characterizes the Gospel is found only in a divine manifestation or revelation, and this doctrine is of principal importance as a light to men, guiding their conduct aright. Ver. 5. "And the light shone in darkness, and the darkness admitted it not."—Darkness was another of the supposed aeons. The Apostle states the simple fact that the Gospel was not received as might have been expected, but was by many obstinately opposed and rejected, in

such a manner as to preclude the personal existence of darkness. Ver. 6, 7. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came as a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that by means of him all men might believe." The light means the *logos*, the shekinah, or manifestation of God, the approach of which John was to announce. Ver. 8. "He was not that Light."—It was not by him that God manifested himself, a declaration rendered necessary by many persons in the first age having set the authority of John the Baptist above that of Christ, forming a sect of which there are still remains in Syria under the name of Seber. "But he was sent to bear witness of that Light." Ver. 9. "That was the true Light, which, coming into the world, was a light to every man" —became a source of light to men of all kinds, both Jews and Gentiles, to both of which classes the Gospel was speedily preached. Ver. 10. "He," the Light, the Logos, not Jesus Christ personally, who has not yet been introduced, "was in the world, and the world was made by him."—It was the same Divine power which created the universe which now displayed itself in diffusing the light of heavenly truth, "yet the world knew him not." Ver. 11. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." *His own* may perhaps here signify the peculiar people, but this is neither certain, nor at all essential to the sense. Ver. 12. "But as many as received him, to them gave he the privilege of becoming the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." To all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, he gave the privilege of being Sons of God, of knowing, loving, and imitating him, and of partaking in his favour. The expression *believing in his name*, may be here used in anticipation of what is just about to be said of the manifestation of God now spoken of, the logos or shekinah, now the subject of discourse, being in Jesus Christ. He goes on to speak of the way in which these believers were obtained. Ver. 13. "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—Who were not brought into God's family by Jewish descent, affinity, or adoption, but by his special favour and the display of his Divine power. Ver. 14. "And the Word became flesh."—This most glorious manifestation of God, of which we speak, was by a man; that man was made the instrument for exhibiting Divine power, and communicating

Divine knowledge. God was so with him that he was the Logos, or means by which God revealed himself. The glory of God was in him like the miraculous light in the holiest part of the temple. In him, the Word, that is God "tabernacled among us," continued his extraordinary manifestations amongst us for a considerable time, so as to give us every opportunity of judging of their character, and appropriating their benefits: "And we beheld his glory," that, namely, of Jesus who, though a man, was the Word, the means of making known the power and will of God. We must recollect that, in the former part, the Logos denoted no really distinct being, but only God himself acting and displaying his perfections; but that display being by a man, this man is God's word, the present means of manifesting him. God dwells in the man, hence "we see his glory, as of the peculiarly beloved Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." The last clause is to be taken as belonging to the words "tabernacled among us;" grace and truth is put for "true grace." It must be observed that Monogenes, only-begotten, the frequent meaning of which term in Jewish writings is, peculiarly-beloved, was another of the fancied aeons: hence the Apostle chooses the term as an epithet of Christ. Ver. 15. "John bare witness concerning him, and cried, saying, 'This is he of whom I spake: He that cometh after me is before me, for he is my principal.'"—This is the whole of John's testimony here produced, the next words being those of the Apostle. Some would place the 15th verse immediately before the 19th, which is very probably right, the observation at the beginning of the 16th arising out of the 14th. Ver. 16. "For of his fulness (St. John may have a particular design in here using in a sense which admits of no mystery the celebrated Gnostic term Pleroma, fulness,) we all have received, and most abundant grace."—So I understand the words, rendered in our Common Translation, "grace for grace." The phrase, I think, is "grace upon grace," and is merely a Hebrew superlative. So it has been understood by Gataker, Schoetgenius, and other eminent critics. Ver. 17. "For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."—The 18th verse is the conclusion, and contains a summary of the proem. The doctrine is, that the Invisible God is manifested by means of his well-beloved Son, who is made fully to know his mind and will. Ver. 18.

"No man hath seen God at any time: the well-beloved Son, who is in the bosom of the Father," (a Hebraism expressing the favour he enjoys, and the free access to, and intercourse with, the Father which he possesses; it is, in fact, another way of expressing that God was peculiarly with him, so that he was, for the time, the Logos of God,) "he hath revealed him."

The reader may now judge for himself how far this interpretation deserves the character I have given it (Sermon, p. 13) for clearness and facility. Those who are led, as I hope many will be, to consult Mr. Upham's interesting work, will observe that he interprets the 4th and 5th verses of previous divine communications, supposing them to convey a sort of abstract of the history of revelation, whilst I refer them to the Gospel. I certainly think that my own plan gives, on the whole, the best sense, and is best supported by authority, but I submit the matter to the serious consideration of candid inquirers.

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THE HARMONY OF NATURE, PROVIDENCE, AND CHRISTIANITY:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL, FINSBURY,

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

MAY 29, 1833.

BY GEORGE HARRIS.

Through every age,
Through every moment up the track of time,
HIS PARENT HAND, with ever new increase
Of happiness and virtue, has adorn'd
The vast harmonious frame.

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PREFACE.

In compliance with the warmly expressed wishes of the Public Meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association of the 29th May, and at the urgent request of the Committee of that Institution at its subsequent assembling, the following Discourse is published, in the earnest hope that it may be instrumental in diffusing the sacred principles of truth, benevolence, and freedom,—in exciting a practical conviction of the importance of these principles to the promotion of human improvement, virtue, and happiness,—in impressing on the minds of all believers the imperative duty of unceasing exertion, both individual and combined, for their dissemination, from the conviction that their dissemination is essential to the enlightenment and purification of man, the elevation and freedom of the human family, the true reverence of the blessed Jesus, and the glory of the One beneficent Father.

As a memorial of the pleasure enjoyed by the Author, in the communion of mind and heart with many valued friends at the late Anniversary Meeting,—in testimony of the high estimation in which he holds the British and Foreign Unitarian Association,—as an expression of respect for its Committee,—in the fervent trust that Unitarian Christians will

more and more perceive the necessity, and acknowledge the obligation, of supporting an Institution so admirably calculated to confer the highest benefits on mankind, by combining heart and hand to ensure and increase its efficiency,—and in prayer that that Eternal Father, to whose pure and spiritual worship he desires to bring his fellow-creatures, and whose undivided and peerless glory he would advance, by promoting the improvement, and the virtue, and the liberties of his race, will bless their and his labours in furtherance of these solemn and all-important objects, the following pages are respectfully inscribed.

Glasgow, *June* 13, 1833.

DISCOURSE.

ISAIAH CHAP. XL. VER. 3, 4, 5.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

IN this beautifully figurative manner were the objects destined to be accomplished by the advent of the Messiah, pointed out to those who were longing for the redemption of Israel, and who cherished the expectation of his approach, as the completion of their own fondest imaginations, as well as the ultimate desire of all nations. These were also the sounds, which, uttered afterwards in the wilderness of Judea, heralded the coming of Him who was to gather in one both Jew and Gentile. These are the words which have sounded in many an ear, and stirred up many a heart, and prompted many an aspiration, and many an effort for the onward progress of humanity, the removal of every error, the advancement of all truth, that man might be improved, the way of the Lord be prepared, the glory of God revealed, in the happiness, the salvation of all the children of the One eternal Father. These are

the purposes which the Christian believer anticipates shall be effected by those principles of purity and love, which are spirit and life, which the Saviour promulgated as the means of present happiness and future blessedness. The sure word of prophecy has predicted their accomplishment; "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Have they been accomplished? Does the world manifest their completion? Does even that portion of society called Christian, exhibit features which accord with the annunciation? No, surely no. Why does it not? All objects of a moral and religious nature are to be effected by means, those means have not been employed, and therefore the result has not been produced. Christianity has seldom been preached in its purity, and the mountains of error are not removed, and the valleys of ignorance remain in their ungenial state. Christianity has been perverted, and its perversions have been forced on the people, and crooked have been the paths in which they have been obliged to walk, and rough their places of habitation, and God's way has not been prepared, for superstition and bigotry have hedged up and defaced it; and God's glory has not been revealed, for mystery has darkened and enshrouded it in gloom.

Christianity as it has been manifested in doctrine and practice in various countries, and as it is portrayed in the New Testament, may in truth be regarded as different religions. The contrast could not be greater, or more striking, though they were. What is Christianity in Spain, what its spirit, what

its fruits? The degradation of man, the slavery of woman, tyranny, priestcraft, persecution, ignorance, the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the clergy, for they are gods upon earth, and they stand between the Deity and his worshipper, and bar the access to the throne of grace by holding themselves forth as mediators to avert God's fury from the populace; and monastic gloom broods over the land, and ecclesiastical tyranny brands the exercise of free thought, and palace and cathedral clog and overpower the bursting forth of the simple elements of truth, and superstition is enthroned in splendour, and darkness dwells among the people.

What is Christianity in Italy? A religion of cardinals and cathedrals, of mystery and mummery, of friars and vestments, white, black, and grey, with all their trumpery, of holy incense and holy water, and holy relics and holy days, of all things holy save the heart of man, the conduct of human life; where the reputed successor of the fisherman of Galilee is surmounted by a triple crown, where the mimic majesty of the world's ruler is substituted for the simple and robeless majesty of truth, the adoration of the Host usurps the place of the adoration of the heart, a breaden deity displaces the ever-living God, the beadroll is preferred to the beatitudes, confession to contrition, the servant of servants to the Saviour of mankind; God is mocked, worship travestied, man brutified, and reason enslaved.

What is Christianity as established in the British dominions? In the North, it wears a stern and rigid aspect, marring the innocent pleasures of life by its

austerity, converting the day sacred to the memory of the resurrection of the Saviour, into the anchorite's gloom; its fasts making men of a sad countenance, placing their dependance on half-yearly celebrations of the substitute for sinners; ruling the people with a rod of scorpions, its Protestantism being the substitution of many Popes for one sovereign Pontiff; its theological education the A B C or Shorter Catechism, its spirit that of the most contracted sectarianism, limiting the pale of salvation within the bounds of the Presbytery, and looking on all beyond as outcasts, with whom to have dealings were a sin, and with whom to associate were profanation.

In the South, what is it but a thing of State, of forms and ceremonies and creeds, some absurd, others contradictory, most unscriptural, yet all by law established; a motley mixture of Popery and Protestantism, of Parliamentary enactment and Royal ordinance, supported by the enforced oblations of the nation, intolerant in faith though individually tolerant in practice, debating inch by inch the onward progress of religious and civil freedom, barring education from the people by fencing universities with articles and anathema, and schools miscalled national, with catechism and creed, branding all dissidents with the mark of Almighty vengeance, and affirming that those shall "without doubt perish everlastingly" who demur to its confused and contradictory propositions.

And in Ireland, it shows a church without a people, and oftentimes a people without a church, strangers

and aliens, aliens alike to the feelings of the inhabitants and the spirit of the Gospel, lords of the ascendant, dwelling in palaces, clothed in purple and fine linen, erecting buildings for show, not use, ignorant of the language, and reckless of the education of the nation among whom they dwell; extorting even from the hopelessness of poverty the uttermost farthing, enforcing their exactions at the point of the bayonet, denouncing the ancient faith as idolatrous and an abomination, but obliging the denounced to pay for the support of that which in all its essential features is closely akin to it, known chiefly by tithes, not teaching, and their aliment covered with the execrations of an impoverished and indignant country. Were this, or any thing like this, Christianity, richly would it merit, and deservedly would it receive, the opposition of those its enactments would enslave, and its spirit would debase. But is this, or any thing like this, Christianity? God forbid!

What then is Christianity? Not a system designed solely for the Priest or the Presbyter, this hemisphere or that, Spain or Britain, Judea or America, but a religion which, like its God, is no respecter of persons; whose spirit is not that of bondage again to fear, but of love and of a sound mind; whose fruits are not tyranny and persecution, but "peace on earth, good will to men." Not a system of petty and minute legislation, of Mass-book, whether "done into English," or retaining its foreign dress; not a bead-roll of intercessions and prayers, but of devotion's essence; not a religion of set days and forms, of penances, fastings, and processions, but of the heart and life.

Not a system for the lord, and the white man only, but for the peasant and the slave equally, that the one may be advanced in intellect, that from the other the manacles may drop for ever. Yes, Christianity proclaims one Father, one brotherhood, one practice, one hope, one salvation—one Father, the Father not alone of this family or that, this sect or that tribe, but the Father of men, the Father of the spirits of all flesh, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—one brotherhood, all men who dwell on all the face of the earth, formed of one blood, made one in Christ, preparing for the same heaven of purity and bliss—one practice, holiness, guided by wisdom, inspired by love, binding equally on the young as the aged, on nations as on individuals, to be good, to do good—one hope, the hope of improvement, the hope of virtue, the hope of heaven, minds enlightened, hearts purified, man happy, God glorified—one salvation, Christ the Saviour, reigning till he has subdued all enemies to the freedom, virtue, and happiness of mankind, then surrendering his power to Him who appointed him the instrument of his mercy, ushering in the kingdom of everlasting and universal righteousness and peace, the Father being all in all, the source of every blessing, the object of all adoration, thanksgiving, and praise.

In these teachings, Christianity is in harmony, *First*, with Nature, and with the progress of natural and moral science; and *Second*, with the Providence of God in the moral education of the human race, and with the progress of human society. With all these, Christianity is in unison; in advance of all these, she

holds on her course; it is the same spirit of simplicity, improvement, freedom, which she breathes, that urges all onward, and that will carry them forward to perfection.

In the First place, Christianity harmonizes with Nature, and with the progress of Natural and Moral Science.

Nature and Revelation have too usually been supposed to be at variance; but this cannot be, if the same Author has produced them. Natural religion has been denounced; its existence even, has been denied by advocates of Revelation. Jealousy for the honour of Revelation, has prompted that denial. It was an irrational and groundless fear. There is a beautiful coincidence between the great truths which each discloses and inculcates. The volume of Scripture may indeed be a comment on the volume of creation, but it cannot be in contradiction to its teachings. It may expand, it may carry forward the lovely theology derived from the all-visible world; but to oppose it, would be to blot out the light which streams in glory from the heavens, and to uproot some of the purest and noblest imaginings which have ever possessed the human mind. The teachings of the creation are always with man.

> "Unconfined
> To Christian land or Jewry, fairly writ
> In language universal to mankind;
> A language worthy the Great Mind that speaks,
> Which oft refers its reader to the skies
> As presupposing his first lesson there,
> And Scripture's self a fragment."

But that lesson must be read, must be studied, before it can be thoroughly understood. Its teachings would not be in accordance with the intellectual and moral nature by which man is distinguished, were it otherwise. It is, in truth, external nature which originally excites thought in the human mind, which discloses to man the objects on which to exercise his intellectual powers, these acted upon by nature's scenes, re-act on the objects which called them forth, and disclose more and more of the treasures of wisdom and of goodness to the admiring gaze of humanity. It is because the lessons of nature have not been properly learned and studied, that men have bowed before the demon of the storm, fashioned to themselves objects of adoration, or worshipped the onion and the crocodile. It is because Nature has been misinterpreted, that superstition has derived from the works of creation, materials wherewith to build and to garnish her altars. Nature, like Revelation, needs an intelligent interpreter; and when it has found one, it testifies of a wise and benignant Author. The contrast which has sometimes been drawn, between the facility with which men understand Nature, and the difficulty with which they comprehend Christianity, is not founded in fact. The probability is, that as few really understand the one as the other. Night's brilliant blazonry teaches no more to an uneducated mind, than algebraic characters to an infant. The temple of Nature is as much closed to the savage, as the Bible is a sealed book to the man who cannot read. In both, reason must interpret, or ignorance will mislead.

There are two great characteristics by which Na-

ture is distinguished—simplicity and sublimity. But the time has been, when ignorance deemed that very simplicity to be confusion, and mountain and ocean were considered proofs of a malevolent power, and the starry orbs were regarded with fear or with childish wonderment. A veil rested on the glories of creation; and that which to the intellectual eye appears pregnant with blessing, seemed to the blinded vision the proof of ruin, and the manifestation of a curse from heaven. A more intimate knowledge of nature and its operations, has shown that to be order which heretofore was deemed confusion, and that harmony which erst was pronounced discord. Those orbs, in which men once read the fate of individuals, and traced the destinies of nations, which were wont, it was thought, to shed disastrous twilight on human hopes, and to portend malignant influences on the prospects of human kind, which were of old the objects of adoration or of dread, are now viewed as additional proofs of the Creator's beneficence and glory, the dwelling-places of intellectual beings, and the ministers, not alone of beauty to our globe, but of light, of life, and of happiness to the races which inhabit, or which circle round them. The ocean, on whose dread bosom few dared venture, and whose mighty mass of waters appeared to shut up more permanently than walls of brass, the nations girt by its shores, is now the thoroughfare of nations, the band which links remotest countries, by which the treasures of one hemisphere are conveyed to the other, and its intelligence transmitted in return, the mighty storehouse from which earth is replenished, and man

made happy. The mountain, which stood as a barrier between the people, its treasures have enabled the mariner to cross the waters, and the astronomer to span the heavens; and all have indicated design, intelligence, an Author, power, wisdom, benignity, all exerted for the comfort, improvement, and happiness of man.

And how have these results been produced? Not by discarding Nature, but by listening to her voice—not by indifference to the truths she discloses, but by attention to her discoveries. Time was, when the truths of Nature were deemed heresies in theology, when philosophy was accounted inimical to devotion, and science was scouted as dangerous to religion. Time was, when the discoverers of geographical and astronomical truths, were endungeoned by the church, as traitors to her interests, and enemies of God, and their discoveries condemned as subversive of Christianity, and contrary to the Holy Scriptures. But that was also the period, when even the New Testament was regarded by the upholders of the church, as the prolific source of heresy and error—when to doubt established opinions, was a fearful crime, and to deviate a hair's-breadth from the dogmatism of the day, was synonymous with persecution, torture, and death. The abettors of superstitious and intolerant establishments, wise in their generation, did well to repudiate researches into Nature's laws. Ignorance was, in truth, the parent of the devotion which they cherished. Darkness, mystery, was their appropriate element, and in that they revelled. The book of Nature, and the book of Life, were equally

closed upon the people, and in their stead all monstrous, all prodigious things, were attributed to nature's workings; pagan metaphysics perverted the understanding, and the divinity of the schools flourished by the aid of preternatural portents, as false as they were horrible.

A brighter day has dawned on the world since then. A more just appreciation of the value of sound philosophy, has been gradually winning its way. Every discovery in science, whilst it has exploded some device of superstition, has only rendered more clear, the eternal principles on which are based pure philosophy and undefiled religion. There is no divorce between philosophy and Christianity; nature, like reason, is the handmaid of religion. Every advance in mental and physical science, has been an approximation to simplicity, and therefore to truth, and therefore to human good;—

> "For truth and good are one,
> And beauty dwells in them, and they in her,
> With like participation."

To affirm the opposition of Nature and Christianity, is to forge weapons for the unbeliever. Were the principles of the one distinguished by simplicity, and those of the other involved in mystery and contradiction; did a wise and beautiful unity pervade the one, and confusion and complexity mark the other, either they must have originated in different causes, as dissimilar in themselves, as unlike in their productions, or one must be at war with truth, inimical therefore to man, and unblessed of heaven. The facts of nature, which never lie, whilst they have shown the

baselessness of miscalled religion, have not thereby disproved Christianity; the rather have they manifested its harmony with those truths, and the consequent divinity of its origin. Christianity has no sympathy with the old theological shibboleth, "I believe because it is impossible;" its declaration, as that of nature, being, I believe because it is plain, simple, beneficent. And therefore is it in perfect harmony with nature, and the philosophy of nature, both mental and physical; for what is philosophy, but the facts of nature, combined and arranged as cause and effect, and the legitimate conclusions deduced from those facts? Whether we look at the causes of day and night, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, plants and flowers, the body and mind of man, the world we dwell in, or the systems of worlds by which we are surrounded, by simplicity are they all distinguished. Not more simple and plain are the laws by which all are governed, than are the elementary principles from which they were produced, and by which they are continued in existence and enjoyment by that Power which spoke them into being, and to whose wisdom and benevolence they bear unceasing testimony. And what is Christianity, but the facts respecting the life, example, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, and the consequences which necessarily follow from their truth—the divine mission of Christ, the oneness and Fatherly character of God, who sanctified and appointed him to be the Saviour of man—the equality of human kind, the redemption of the human family by the regulation of their actions, the purification of

the heart, the improvement of the intellect, and the consequent production of holiness, beneficence, and peace—Christ one with the Father, and man one with his race, and the Parent of creation all in all. Christianity, therefore, is at one with the facts of nature. They no more utter discordant voices, than can the music of the spheres. The systematic theology of established churches, of Confession, and of Catechisms, may dread the researches of philosophy, for to that theology those researches will be fatal. The philosophy of nature, with its foundation axiom, that no causes are to be supposed which are not necessary to account for the production of the effects, strikes at once at the root of all tri-personalities in the Great Author of nature. And the philosophy of mind, which discloses the springs of human action, manifests the impossibility of inborn corruption, and sin-bred faculties. But with Christian truth, philosophy sweetly harmonises, wearing the aspect of a friend, a sister. It is with philosophy falsely so called, that Christianity is at variance, that philosophy by which its sacred and life-giving truths were primarily corrupted, and by which those corruptions are still upheld. The one is of the earth, earthy; the other is of God, and for good to all creation's habitants.

> "Oh how unlike the complex works of man,
> Heaven's artless, easy, unencumber'd plan;
> No meretricious graces to beguile,
> No useless ornaments to clog the pile,
> It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,
> Majestic in its own simplicity."

In the Second place, Christianity harmonises with the Providence of God, as manifested in the moral education of the human race, and with the progress of human society.

It has been objected to Christianity, that had it been of divine original, the Almighty would have inscribed its truths on the sun and moon, and all mankind would then have received its instructions in twenty-four hours. With equal propriety might it be objected, that God is not the creator of the human race, because the manhood of intellect is not fully and perfectly developed in the child. The objection is a fallacy. It assumes, that Nature must necessarily be understood by all who even glance over the objects it discloses. It assumes, that the familiar objects of Nature, great and glorious as they confessedly are, always excite attention and regard from men of every clime and every gradation of intellect. It assumes, that men of all climes, and of all degrees of intelligence, are equally prepared for receiving the knowledge of truth and duty. The contrary is the fact. Were it otherwise, the mutual dependance of the race would be useless, the feelings which knit man to his brother, and which render the intelligent a blessing to the ignorant, would have no room for exercise. To give the objection weight, man must have been a differently constituted being from what he is.

It has also been objected to Christianity, that it cannot be necessary to human improvement and salvation, it cannot be divine, otherwise its truths would have been disclosed to man ages before they were.

The objection is only fatal to that superstition which limits salvation to a tribe or party, which sentences the wise and virtuous of days gone by to perdition, because they believed not in that Christianity which was then unrevealed, which deems the Providence of God as contracted as their own sectarianism, which cannot argue from that natural Providence which causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and the rain to descend on the just and the unjust, to that moral Providence which has in all ages had its own means of improving and carrying forward, and blessing the creature, according to its capacities of advancement and enjoyment, which, if not acting on the human mind by supernatural agency, has ever effected its purposes of mercy by that moral law, engraven on the human heart, by which those destitute of the light of Revelation, are nevertheless a law unto themselves. Powerless is the objection, as applied to Christianity, for that, like its Almighty Author, embraces in its benignant regards the intelligent creation, declaring in language too plain to be mystified, and too beneficent to be overborne by bigotry, "God is no respecter of persons; in every nation, he who feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."

There is a moral progression in human beings, as well as a natural development of the faculties which distinguish them. Nor does the race differ in this respect from the individual. The one has its stages of infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, maturity; and the other is advancing to perfection by similar changes. The sustenance, the discipline, the instruction fitted

for one period, would be manifestly inappropriate, unwise at others. Wisdom, goodness is shown in all cases, by apportioning the means to the wished for end. That parent is a blessing to his family, and the community, who in the education of his offspring, makes that adaptation the primary object of his solicitude and practice. And God, the universal Father, has thus manifested his wise and beneficent Providence, in training and governing his large and wide spread family. His method has been, not to prostrate the human mind by overwhelming exhibitions of his omnipotence, but to suit his dispensations to the frame and constitution of the creature in all the varied stages of his being. He remembered man was dust. He ministered to the opening intelligence of his child, by the peaceful admonitions of the beautiful and the good in the creation of his love. By those admonitions were the children of earth, whilst conversing with nature, led also to commune with Heaven; and the earthen mound was reared, and the first-fruits of the abundance with which man was blessed, were offered in gratitude to the Power which made him happy. The converse of the world's habitants was with sensible objects only, and by material emblems were their thanksgivings uttered. To have spoken to them of the spiritual nature of Deity, and of the obligation and beauty of pure and inward adoration, would have been to crush the expanding affections of humanity, and to overlay the intellect by encumbering the thoughts with truths the mind could not in its infancy have grasped. 'Twas in merciful adaptation to the weakness of human na-

ture, therefore, that God thus bowed the heavens and came down, aiding and encouraging his children in the commencement of life's eventful pilgrimage.

Were the sacrificial rites of ancient days made obligatory on the present generation, it would indeed be a burden too heavy and grievous to be borne; but it does not follow that they were not admirably adapted to the state of society, in which they were appointed to be observed by the descendants of Abraham. Their object was the same as that of the teachings of external nature, the improvement and virtue of mankind. The nations were steeped in idolatry; rites and ceremonies and sacrifices were the instruments by which their abominations were practised. Their emancipation from error, was to be effected by setting apart one people as the depositories of the great truths, that God is One, and that he is the sovereign Disposer of all things. And these truths were to be impressed on the mind, by appropriating to the sole adoration of the One Jehovah, the ceremonials which had heretofore been used at the idol's altar. There was wisdom, beneficence, in that appropriation. It overruled evil for good. Whilst it soothed human ignorance by an adaptation of means suited to its condition, it made that very ignorance subservient to human improvement by rendering it the instrument of acceptable worship, of elevating the conceptions of the human mind above the gods of wood and of stone, and directing its thoughts to the One Infinite Majesty of heaven and earth.

In beautiful adaptation to the circumstances of its recipients, did the inspirations of hope kindle the

imagination of holy men of God, and the voice of the Prophet was heard, warning against the vain dependence on rites and ceremonies, oblations and appointed feasts,—as if the most rigid practice and observance of these means of virtue and acceptance, could ever be rationally substituted for the end which those means were instituted to accomplish, teaching the people to cease to do evil, to learn to do well. That voice was likewise heard, uttering anticipations which strengthened the weak hands, and confirmed the feeble knees, and made strong the fearful heart. It told of a mighty Deliverer, the desire of all nations —it taught them that the redemption of Israel was nigh, it called on them to "prepare the way of the Lord."

And in the fulness of time, that Deliverer was manifested. Not in pomp and splendour did he tabernacle with men. The palaces of kings were not his dwelling-place. Not in the halls of the mighty did he utter the truths of which he was the faithful witness. In the abodes of poverty and wretchedness was he found, cheering the way-worn traveller, speaking consolation to the mourner in Zion. Light and love were the characteristics he ascribed to the universal Father, in whom he trusted; and light and love are accurately descriptive of those sacred principles, by whose agency Christ purposed the regeneration, not alone of Israel, but the world. In Christianity, men are baptised into the spirit of a philanthropy which knows no bound but earth, and no close to its labours but the salvation of human kind. Love is the test of its discipleship; love is the

fulfilling of its commandments. Deep, unfailing trust in God our Father, is its faith; hope in the onward progress of man, the ultimate triumph of virtue and felicity, sustains and encourages that faith in every season, whether of peril or of peace; and love is at once the instrument of effecting all which its faith and its hope anticipates and believes, and its universal prevalence and practice, the consummation of all that is virtuous, and holy, and transporting. Simple, plain, in its teachings, Christianity walks with men, as Jesus walked with his disciples in Judea, opening up to the humblest, the knowledge which aids and encourages them to press forward to perfection; at the same time, it is so exalted in the truths it discloses, as still to keep in advance even of those who have trodden the firmest and the foremost in the paths of wisdom, and ascended to the highest points of moral and intellectual greatness, urging them also, onward, and upward still. It is thus that it proves itself to be the power and the wisdom of God in the sanctification and blessedness of man. Ages have passed away since its promulgation, but no brighter or holier truths have yet dawned on man. Art and science have improved, but they have not outgrown Christianity. Its object is to give man the victory over the world by keeping himself unspotted from its corruptions, and therefore was it in advance of the world at its first promulgation; the world has been gradually coming to its brightness, but it is in advance of the world even yet.

The history of Christianity itself illustrates these positions. In the mind of Jesus, the conception of

a religion intended for all time, and embracing all mankind, was perfect. His pure spirit saw what was in man, and to his clear perception were disclosed the heights of glory to which man could be raised. His philanthropic feelings, though profoundly interesting him in family, and friends, and country, were carried out to the poor, the depraved, the race he was appointed to instruct and bless. He lived, he died for the world, but his spirit breathed of heaven.

Not so those whom he addressed. Jewish prejudice bound their minds; Jewish prejudice contracted their hearts. That Israel should be saved, they could credit; that the Gentile should share the salvation, was beyond belief. Worship at Jerusalem, they knew was acceptable; that the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth, in the closet as in the Temple, should equally meet acceptance, they could not comprehend. The righteousness of the law, they valued and relied on; to substitute for that righteousness, purity of thought, and a benevolence, embracing in its regards, Samaritan and Judean, bond and free, was contrary to all their habits, and all their feelings. Are we warranted by the record of the history of Christ's teachings, to conclude that all the early disciples, that even all the Apostles, entered at all times into the full and complete spirituality and beneficence of the Saviour's views? "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." The practical realization of the universal religion of Jesus, in the depths of its purity and love, does it seem manifested in their contentions respecting Judaical observances; in their difficulty of apprehending the length and

breadth of Christian benevolence; in the sophisms and minglings of a vain philosophy; in the intemperance which sometimes attended the celebration of the Saviour's dying exhortation of remembrance? The ideas of the universal and perfect purity of all the primitive churches, rest on no better grounds than the fond fancy of past golden ages of innocence and peace. The perfection of man, both as an individual and as a race, is future, not past. Man's duty consists, not in looking back with regret, but forward with hope,—"*leaving the word of the beginning of Christ,*" to go on to perfection.

Christianity was soon and wofully corrupted. Its connexion with human policy tainted its purity; state trappings disfigured its loveliness; it was degraded into the pander to human corruption; civil and ecclesiastical tyranny made it the instrument of debasement, slavery, and woe. It is only as men have been winning their way to the Gospel of Christ, discarding the explications of intolerant churches, and contradictory catechisms, it is only as men have sat at the feet of Jesus, to learn from himself lessons of purity and beneficence, that the perfection of Christianity has been gradually developing. The Reformation did much for this object. It broke the spell of misbegotten fear, which had, during ages of misrule and superstition, chained down the human mind, and lacerated the human heart. It gave the watchword of liberty to the nations, but that liberty has as yet been only partially achieved. In exact proportion to the steadiness and consistency with which men have acted up to the principles of the Reformation,

is the measure of their advancement in Christian knowledge and freedom; is the swiftness with which they have gone on from strength to strength, and perceived more and more of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is because men dread to move forward, that mystery still envelopes the cross, and that the veil of the Temple is still rent by divisions. It is this dread of inquiry, this horror of innovation, this closing up of the human mind with bolts and bars, that keeps the mass of the people in the stagnation of unvarying belief; the belief which regards involuntary mental error as a crime, and deems a difference in opinion the grossest immorality. Happy had it been for the world called Christian, had it imbibed the spirit, and acted in accordance with the advice which in 1620 was given by the venerable Puritan to his flock, when about to brave ocean's perils, and to pierce the Western forests, that there, unmolested by royal or priestly tyranny, they might raise an altar to the Omnipresent Spirit. Auspicious augury for the improvement and blessedness of man, were it acted up to by Christian professors even now.

"I cannot," exclaimed the truly Christian pastor, "sufficiently bewail the condition of the Reformed Churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of his will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it: and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man

of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their time, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received." "It is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth all at once." "*I am verily persuaded the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of his Holy Word.*"*

The progress of human society, illustrates the beneficence, the divinity of Christian principles. That progress has been one continued struggle with the powers of evil, the rulers of the darkness of the world. The lust of dominion has committed fearful ravages on human kind. The many were slaves to the few, and those few rioted in their sway. No matter what became of the multitude, so that the caprices of the noble were satiated. His will was law, and by that law his serfs were bound. The abject many were the villains of the soil, and its proprietors were their lords. But the iron hoof of despotism was sometimes planted too fiercely down, and the mutilated victim, in its throes of agony, turned on the aggressor. Those conflicts became more frequent, and some recognition of other beings besides lords and priests, was the result. Gradually that recognition became more extended. A portion of the mass was raised a

* The whole Address of the venerable Christian pastor, Robinson of Leyden, from which these extracts are made, is inserted in "Neal's History of the Puritans," Vol. II. p. 119–122.

step in the social scale. By various means, the brand of servitude became less deeply scarred. Motives of contradictory description, led to the transition from servile degradation to acknowledged rights, till at length the people became more or less a component part of the community. Varied, doubtless, has been the mode, by which, in different countries, the removal of the yoke has been effected; but in all, the degree in which it has yet been accomplished, is only an approximation to that perfect freedom, which is alone to be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As a natural consequence of this progress of society, this adoption of Christian principles, the claims of the mass of human beings, the cries of the poor, have been heard. Previously to Christianity, the mass of the people, the poor, were utterly disregarded. It established their claims on the fraternal regards of those of their brethren whom the common Father had blessed with abundance. "The poor have the Gospel preached to them," was a fact, not an idle assertion. That fact was one proof of the divinity of Christ's mission. And his Gospel sympathised with their wants both physical and moral; it soothed their wretchedness, it cheered their fainting spirits. "The common people" heard the Saviour gladly, for his heart was with the oppressed, not the oppressor. And as society has advanced in intelligence and freedom, it has come more and more to perceive, and act upon the truths which Jesus disclosed. It has done so, not merely in what is called its charitable feelings towards the destitute; not merely in what is most improperly termed its condescension to

the humbler classes, but chiefly, in its efforts for their moral education and elevation, as rational and immortal beings,—in labours to lift them from the moral degradation into which poverty and unremitting and often unrequited toil has often sunk them,—in treating them as a portion of the great human family, to whose physical and moral condition, according to the example of Christ, special attention and care should be paid by all Christ's followers.

And woman, too, has benefited by the changes of society; woman has experienced the sacred and benignant influences of Christianity. Is there not a striking contrast between the situation she occupied before the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, with that which she has held since? More striking must it yet be, ere the blessed purposes of the religion of benevolence and purity are fully realised. The estimation in which woman is held, as the parent, instructor, companion, friend, and counsellor of man, is the exact measure of the progress of civilization, the evidence of how far man has entered into the spirit of the benignant Saviour.

There is a tyranny of mind as well as of the body, and of course there is a slavery in both. Time was, when only one class of religionists had a legal existence in this country, the members of the hierarchy. Legislation was employed to crush the exercise of thought, and to confine the mind to a ceaseless round of forms and ceremonies. Despite of penal enactments, light broke in, and some dared think. Age after age witnessed repeated efforts for the establishment of that most monstrous of all idols, *Uniformity;*

age after age also witnessed the total helplessness of human power in effecting the impossibility. All dissidents were accounted aliens from the commonwealth, but their number increased notwithstanding, and some are now participants in many of the privileges of the State. Toleration has been established; but Christian liberty has still to achieve her triumphs. Thought is not yet free. The believer in the Old Testament is still excluded from civil privileges, by the believer in the New; whilst the unbeliever in either, is still regarded as a fitting subject for imprisonment. One denomination is patronised by the government, and the others are taxed for its support. Christianity is bound to the chariot-wheels of the State, and individual judgment is exercised under the evil influences of worldly power, prejudice, and fashion.

Notwithstanding these impediments, society is advancing towards the liberty wherewith Christ has made his disciples free. Corporation and Test Acts have ceased; and the prayer of millions for emancipation, has been granted. The laws which once, in almost every country, pressed the descendants of Abraham to the earth, which hunted them from society, as beings on whom it was an act of allegiance to Christ to vent the execrations of Christ's disciples; the iniquitous policy, which in secret encouraged the industry of the despised outcasts of Israel, till that industry had made accumulation sufficient to tempt the appetite of royal or priestly avarice;—those enactments and that policy have alike yielded to the progress of civilization, and to the influence of Chris-

tian precept and the Christian spirit. The remaining barbarism will also disappear, and they will be acknowledged as members of society, entitled to exercise its rights and to participate in its immunities.

The bonds of the sable portion of the human family, shall also be broken. Degraded may the slave well be, when ages of suffering and degradation have more and more obliterated the image and superscription which once was graven there;—but the religion which proclaims one human nature in all men, however modified by climate, government, or faith; one God and Father of all; one brother and head of all, Jesus the Saviour; and one glorious career of boundless everlasting improvement for all the creatures of the Almighty, knows nothing of privileged classes, and makes no distinction as to differences of colour. The insolence of power, the despair of the oppressed, it would equally remove. It brings deliverance to the captive, and its practical disciples are free indeed. Christianity is freedom from Judaism, freedom from national antipathies, freedom from civil and ecclesiastical interference with conscience, freedom from prejudice and error and sin. It is an initiation into all that is enlightened and benevolent; it is the pursuit of the true, the beautiful, and the good; it trains man to become partaker of the Divine nature, by daily, hourly assimilation to the Source of intelligence, goodness, and truth.

Many a proposition fraught with blessing to mankind, many an effort for human improvement, and the melioration of human condition, has been set aside, on the ground that it was repugnant to religion

and contrary to the Word of God. Misrule and superstition have made frequent appeals to the letter of Scripture, in support of their atrocities. In this way, the slave-holder has found his justification, the legislator his authority for severe and cruel enactments, the conqueror an example for his deeds of blood; Episcopacy its offices and orders; Presbyterianism its model of church government; and the wildest fanatic, the command he was bound to obey. The spirit and life of Revelation, has been sacrificed to an ignorant, uninquiring adherence to the mere letter and sound of the Record. The Bible has not been read and interpreted, as the history of the dispensations of Heaven, suited to the onward progress of man. Rather has it been received and regarded as a code of minute legislation. Its varied portions of history, prophecy, thanksgiving, commandment, have been considered as equally given by inspiration, and as equally binding on the men of all times and of every climate. Each separate text has been viewed as an assertion of some particular truth; and every wayward fancy has found some isolated passage on which to build up its imaginings. The wise and beneficent plan of Providence in the gradual education and advancement of the human race, has been overlooked, by thus confounding the varied dispensations by which that education and advancement have been effected. Unbelief has thereby been furnished with its mightiest weapons; and the mind of numbers been wearied and perplexed with a mere war of words. As well might an individual believe himself a Jew, because he clothed himself in garments once

worn in Palestine, as that he had drank into the spirit of the Gospel, and that Christ was enthroned in the soul, because the phraseology of the New Testament was ever issuing from his lips. "They that have not the spirit of Christ, are none of his." And the spirit of Christianity must be extracted from the record of its history; the conceptions which filled the mind of Jesus, must be realised in our own minds, before the full scope and tendency of Christian truth will be completely perceived. Men shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, when God's image is reflected on their own minds. Man must be benevolent, before he can fully appreciate the love of the Father. Man must be pure, before he can adequately comprehend the spotless holiness of God. Slavery will cease when the spirit of the Lord prevails, for "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." War will glut itself no more with human blood, for his new commandment is that of love; and enmity could exist no longer, if Christ's spirit of peace possessed his followers. Punishment will be a wise and righteous infliction, when crime is viewed as a disease, and the criminal is regarded as a brother; when earth's legislators act upon Christian doctrine—every man shall be rewarded according to his deeds—and one united effort be made, to lead the offender, by salutary discipline, to reformation, to his Father's house of mercy and forgiveness.

In thus describing the nature, objects, and effects of Christianity, what have I been doing but portraying the beauty, beneficence, and truth of those principles which we hold sacred, believing them con-

sonant to reason, and identical with the religion of Jesus. Of Unitarianism, as of Christianity, all that I have said is true. Is it true of any other professedly Christian system? Is it true of that representation of religion, which describes the universe as covered with a funeral pall, the Creator as sitting in stern and solitary gloom behind the elements he has formed, frowning on the creation of his power, and with the blighting malediction of his wrath changing its fruitfulness to sterility, its loveliness to deformity—following finite demerit with present misery and infinite torture, glutting his vengeance in the creature's anguish, effacing his image from human kind, converting the innocence and purity of infancy, into the tainted germ of corruption and death—making man impotent for good, but inclined to all evil, and that continually, yet calling for obedience where he has not bestowed moral ability, expecting to reap where he has not strewn, his justice refusing to be satisfied save with the uttermost farthing—satiating his malignity only in the blood of his innocent and co-equal partner, his delight in Christ being "manifested in the perdition of those that perish, as well as in the salvation of those that are saved;"* his sovereign decree counteracting the efficacy even of the infinite sacrifice for sin, a few only being elected to happiness, the great mass reprobated to perdition; the termination of the government of a God of power, wisdom, and beneficence, being the pollution, the helpless, remediless agony of unredeemed and countless myriads, the happiness of heaven increased by their torment, and the glory of God revealed "by the fires

of Tophet, as well as by the light of Paradise."* Are these glad tidings of great joy to all people? Are these sentiments the means by which peace on earth and good will to man, are to be produced? Is that reverence of human nature there to be found, which can alone prompt to consistent and unceasing labours for the improvement and freedom of human kind? Are these the representations of Deity, which will bind us to the Creator with the filial affection of children to a Father? Is this Christianity? Oh no, surely no.

Rejoice may we the more, however, in that human nature which even such a faith cannot corrupt; praise and honour give we to those, who with such views of God and man, advocate human rights and aid human improvement. Human inconsistency is here the instrument of good. With a more rational and scriptural faith, how would their hearts overflow with happiness, how free their minds, how fervent their zeal, how abiding their hope! Whilst we compassionate those who are bound in chains of prejudice, our duty is to thank God for our own emancipation, to take courage from the world's advancement, and to labour unceasingly for its onward progress. How strong the contrast between their views and ours! How much greater on us the obligation to do good, and to aid the improvement, and to advocate the liberties of man. One Infinite Spirit comprehending and guiding all existence, surveying all worlds, and

* "Sermons by Ralph Wardlaw, D.D. Glasgow," 1829, p. 422, 432. This is indeed to preach Calvinism (Dr. Wardlaw calls it preaching Christ!) "in all its humiliating and offensive peculiarities," Sermons, p. 4.

controlling every event, riding on the whirlwind, and whispering in still small voice to the human soul, perceiving the end from the beginning, and carrying forward every thing to a blissful termination,—how simple, how sublime! And how simple the means too, by which, under God's direction, all this amount of good is to be effected,—human agency, man blessing man, kind affections, virtuous conduct, enlightened understandings, regenerated hearts, misery ceasing because sin is uprooted, felicity perpetual, unbounded.

Thus are we furnished with additional motives to bind our religion to our hearts, to speed its progress, for in that progress is included the progress of society, in that progress earth is blessed and Heaven is honoured. The Institution which has assembled us here to-day, is founded on these principles. The generous, diffusive spirit of Christian philanthropy, is stamped upon its objects. You are not content with the enjoyment of the blessings of truth and liberty yourselves; you would invite to their participation, your neighbours, your friends, your countrymen; you would embrace in your regards, not alone the natives of these isles, you would bind in fraternal union the race of which you constitute a portion. Not content with the acknowledgment of your own civil rights, you aided the removal of the brand from the Dissenter; you laboured for the emancipation of the Catholic. You are struggling in behalf of your elder Unitarian brethren; you would rejoice in universal religious freedom, the removal of every impediment to the exercise of free, unfettered thought. You look on the abodes of poverty and vice, which especially

deface the cities of the land, and you would convey into their wretchedness the accents of mercy and instruction and peace. You would free the slave; you would destroy castes; you would emancipate the mind; you would regenerate the heart. You would stand in the van in the contest for the improvement, the liberties of the world. Ever remember the dignity of the station which, in God's providence, you have been called to occupy. Awaken to the importance of your high and honourable vocation. Let no obstacles discourage; let no opposition dismay you. Nature, Providence are your allies. On you, and such as you, is it to prove, whether love shall be the governing principle of human advancement, or whether man must continue to be driven by tyrants and their tools, by force and by fear to the performance of his duty. On all occasions, vindicate what you deem the truth of God. On all occasions, stand up for human nature, too long fearfully degraded, enslaved, and trodden on by tyranny, civil and religious. Reverence yourselves. Reverence your race. Reverence the God in whose image man was created. Advance by every means the education, improvement, freedom, happiness of the human family. Call on men to think. Call on men to act as rational and immortal beings. Redeem Christianity from its connection with earthly creeds, and political churches. Pull down spiritual wickedness from its palaces of worldly glory. Erase all evil from your own hearts. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world and its corruptions. Then shall the Saviour be enthroned in your souls, and his spirit of purity and love be

diffused throughout society; and from a regenerated and enlightened world, the chorus of thanksgiving shall ascend in the blessed name of Jesus, to Him, the origin and end of all things, the God of freedom, the Bestower of blessedness, the Parent of creation and of man. "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, ALLELUJAH, FOR THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH." *Amen.*

GLASGOW:
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A SERMON.

THE EXISTING STATE OF THEOLOGY, AS AN INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT, AND RELIGION AS A MORAL INFLUENCE:

93/4

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL

IN

South Place, Finsbury,

ON

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21st, 1834,

BEING THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BY

JAMES MARTINEAU.

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1834.

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A SERMON.

Acts ii. 7, 8:

AND THEY WERE ALL AMAZED, AND MARVELLED, SAYING ONE TO ANOTHER, BEHOLD, ARE NOT ALL THESE WHICH SPEAK GALILEANS? AND HOW HEAR WE EVERY MAN IN OUR OWN TONGUE, WHEREIN WE WERE BORN?

This week commemorates the most remarkable revolution of opinion that history records. If other anniversaries commemorate Christ, this celebrates the birth of Christianity; if others bring before us passages from his personal history, and tempt our thoughts to the scenes of his infancy, his sorrow, his death, his immortality, this recalls the history of his religion, considered as a set of influences operating on society. Christianity had finally passed from the lips and the life of Christ; it was no longer to be seen and heard; from the present it had been transferred into the past; it was just enshrined in that historical form which, first by the oral attestation, then by the written record, of disciples, has since been the medium of its agency on

the world. The Galilean missionaries had just made their first efforts in the holy city,—just braced their conscience to assume their anxious yet noble position, and plunged into all the responsibilities and perils and glory of their task. Even with the voice of the great Teacher still whispering in their memory, and the consciousness of inspiration fresh upon their minds, it was no light task, to peasants such as they, to re-awaken the passions which had acted the tragedy of the cross, and speak to priests of their guilt, to Jerusalem of its danger, to an unwilling people of their freedom and their losses. But they were strong in the command, "Go ye, and teach all nations," and they went: and simple as were their instruments,—an utterance of power and miracles of love,—they set in action that mighty influence which has crumbled away superstitions consecrated by genius and time, and remodelled the sentiments and character of men.

We seek to diffuse a renovated Christianity;—amid the confusion of creeds to bring back the minds of men to the few grand principles which acted on the souls, and were heard from the lips, of apostles; which have maintained the vitality of the Christian system in every age; which our own times pre-eminently need, to conduct the process of social regeneration; and which alone can fulfil to the future the gospel's promise of perpetuity. We feel on us a mission, in character less peculiar, but in obligation not less sacred, than that of the mes-

sengers of the resurrection; the mission which devolves on all who have a love of truth to aid the agitation of thought. Not unfitting, therefore, is it for us to make this our week of Pentecost; to surround ourselves with the recollections of those days when the Christian controversy was first rife in Jerusalem; to feel sympathy with that earnest self-devotion with which, in the courts of the temple, at the very shrine of an exclusive worship, in the audience of a wily priesthood, amid the fears of trembling friends, and beneath, perhaps, the fiery eye of Saul, Peter stood erect to proclaim a faith, whose Providence was impartial, whose devotion was spiritual, and whose promise was immortal life. The instruments of our task are indeed different: we have no touch of miracle with which to startle the careless attention, and, by banishing a pain of body, to create a listening serenity of mind. But neither does our mission require such aids; for the powers against which they were matched have passed away. Judæa, then the strong-hold of unsocial religion, was soon lost in the vortex of Roman dominion; the imposing philosophy, the caustic scepticism, the graceful polytheism of Greece, were swept away by that hardy population of the North which was consigned to Christianity to educate; and Rome itself, whose magnificence attracted the last feelings of regard to a mythological Paganism, has now become venerated again as the representative of a mythological Christianity.

Widely, however, as the modern reformer may differ from the ancient apostles, in the difficulties which he encounters and the agencies which he enlists, there was one feature in God's miraculous mode of disseminating the gospel which he may wisely imitate. The gift of tongues uttered to every tribe a different speech, and administered the same thoughts to the inhabitants of far-separated lands. And as this supernatural voice discriminated regions, so should our natural persuasion discriminate periods. The ages are no less diversified than the countries of the world; and each, having a peculiar character, must be addressed in a peculiar language; its genius and tendencies must be consulted by those who aim at its improvement. In varying the modes of exhibiting great principles, there is no compromise of their immutability; for, in proportion to the magnitude of a truth is its versatility of application; and, like those comprehensive formulæ in physical science which include in their statement innumerable phenomena, and either stoop to the solution of the meanest motion on the surface of the earth, or rise to the interpretation of the planetary courses, —the great moral truths which constitute Christianity alike illuminate the individual conscience, and determine those mighty social questions which agitate communities, and preside over the vicissitudes of the world. From inattention to this character of pliancy, many Protestant churches have indulged in an inconsiderate passion for imitating

the apostles; and, like all imitators, they have copied most scrupulously the only circumstances which are unfit to undergo transferrence. Overlooking the noble intelligence with which those holy men threw themselves into the wants of their own times and seized the singularities of their own position, they have trusted, in the diffusion of reformed opinion, to that one system which the first missionaries of the gospel, in the possession of miracle and without the possession of the press, found most effectual for the dissemination of historical fact. With a desire to avoid this error, and to appreciate justly the existing relations of Christianity to society, I propose to inquire, what are the means to which we should now trust for the promotion of theological truth and the elevation of religious sentiment among the great body of the people.

It is a law of Providence in communities, that ideas shall be propagated downwards through the several gradations of minds. They have their origin in the suggestions of genius, and the meditations of philosophy: they are assimilated by those who can admire what is great and true, but cannot originate; and thence they are slowly infused into the popular mind. The rapidity of the process may vary in different times, with the facilities for the transmission of thought, but its order is constant. Temporary causes may shield the inferior ranks of intelligence from the influence of the superior;

fanaticism may interpose for awhile with success; a want of the true spirit of sympathy between the instructors and the instructed may check by a moral repulsion the natural radiation of intellect: but, in the end, Providence will reassert its rule; and the conceptions born in the quiet heights of contemplation will precipitate themselves on the busy multitudes below. This principle interprets history and presages futurity. It shews us in the popular feeling and traditions of one age, a reflection from the philosophy of a preceding :* and from the prevailing style of sentiment and speculation among the cultivated classes now, it enables us to foresee the spirit of a coming age. Nor only to foresee it, but to exercise over it a power, in the use of which there is a grave responsibility. If we are far-sighted in our views of improvement; if we are ambitious, less of immediate and superficial effects, than of the final and deep-seated agency of generous and holy principles; if our love of opinions is a genuine expression of the disinterested love of truth;—we shall remember who are the teachers of futurity; we shall appeal to those, within whose closets God is already computing the destinies of remote generations,—men at once erudite and free, men who have the materials of knowledge with which to determine the great problems of morals and religion, and a genius to think, and imagine, and feel, without let or hindrance of hope

* See Note A.

or fear. In short, the cultivation of theological science is of superlative importance, not merely with the object of preserving to a class an elevated and dignified pursuit, but with the more excellent aim of elaborating for society the purest views of God, of human nature, of life and immortality.

There are many, I believe, who will smile at the application of the word science to theology, and set it down to the account of professional pomp. And if this feeling exists, as it naturally may, in the minds of able and philosophic men, it is itself an illustration of my position. If they, who know well what science is, cannot trace its image in theology; if from the latter they turn away, as from a thing of much clerical but little human interest; —what can be inferred, but that the religious literature of our country is far below the wants of the higher class of intellects, and needs the accession of more earnest thought, profounder reasoning, and a more comprehensive spirit of research, in order to redeem it from contempt. This feeling of contempt cannot remain for ever confined to those who are professedly studious: it has already, indeed, extended far beyond them; and intelligent and reflecting men, who yet make no pretension to philosophy, look with aversion on the leaden and soulless productions of the theological press. It is not to be expected that the labours of the biblical critic should ever become popular: but the distaste for them in England proceeds from something else than the

mere dryness of philology. They are felt to be technical and cramped; the awkward toil of minds manacled by creeds, endeavouring to atone by microscopic accuracy for imbecility in fundamental principles, and not pervaded by that true spirit of history, that sympathy with the soul of antiquity, which is essential to the interpreter of the venerable monuments of the past. Nor does our practical divinity meet with a much warmer welcome. It does not succeed in penetrating to the interior wants of our moral nature; it strives, and menaces, and declaims for admission to the heart; it proves its right of entrance, and yet remains without; it does not pass the sacred boundary, and steal into the home inclosure of the affections. It has, in fact, ceased to address itself to the common heart of humanity, and become exclusively adapted to that peculiar class of persons called "the religious public"—a class trained under highly artificial influences, strongly tending to make them, if enthusiastic, mistake extravagance for imagination, and vehemence for feeling; and, if sober, correctness for beauty, and solemnity for depth.

To the reformers, who placed the Bible in our hands, we certainly owe the very materials for scriptural study; to their rejection of authoritative interpretations, the motive to its pursuit; and to their own personal research, an excellent opening to its ample field. Yet it may be doubted whether the low condition of theology in this country is not

to be ascribed, in part, to an ignorant use of the great principle of Protestantism; whether, in the eagerness to inculcate on every man the right of private judgment, the right has not been mistaken for the power. Urge on mankind their intellectual prerogatives, and be silent on their intellectual needs; invite their judgments, and starve their minds, and it is easy to foresee the result;—they will be at the mercy of every shallow adventurer, and learn from him to dogmatise where wisdom doubts. Grave and intricate questions will be submitted to incompetent arbitration; theological and philosophical opinions, whose evidence is a compound of science, history, criticism, will be summoned before a popular tribunal: the advocates will adapt themselves to their audience, and the quantity and quality of their reasonings, the style of their language, the nature of their illustrations, will be such as may best persuade the ill-informed and impress the unrefined. If theology, like all other sciences, had been first organized by the meditations of superior understandings, and then, so far as its character admits, rendered accessible to the general mind, it is impossible that its phraseology could have been so coarse and vague, its logic so cabalistic, its spirit so narrow. I do not mean to imply that there is any thing peculiarly difficult in the Christian religion. The historical records which contain it, do in fact convey its great essentials to every mind; and they would suggest nothing else, if we could

set mankind down to the study of them, with precisely the feelings which possessed the first hearers of the glad tidings. But to effect this simplification of feeling, to re-produce the natural and graceful attitude of mind with which the first converts listened, is the very difficulty which we have to encounter. Artificial conceptions, the long accumulation of centuries; subtle and scholastic questions, imbedded in the ponderous learning of other times; superstitious feelings, the heritage transmitted to us by generations of venerated men, have fastened themselves to the words of the gospel, and overwhelmed the simple and pure impressions which their fresh utterance awakened. And hence it is, that we can now penetrate to religion only through theology—one of whose great offices it is, to clear away this dust of antiquity, and restore to sight our temple of pure worship in its majestic and beautiful proportions. It is the task of minds inured to toil and thought, to conduct this laborious work; it is the right of others to learn how it proceeds; and there must be a welcome to all who can qualify themselves to take part in it: but that sectarian democracy, which abandons exclusively to the suffrages of the multitude the decision of theological perplexities on which erudition and philosophy pause, needs an emphatic discouragement. The question, how is this discouragement to be administered? is a branch of that great social problem which the times are rapidly pressing to its solution

—how are the evils, political and religious, of ignorance to be remedied? Society still fluctuates between two answers: one class eager to withhold from the uninformed all needless power; another, to afford them all needful knowledge. For my own part, I believe that consequences of immense magnitude depend upon the speedy triumph of the latter,—upon the reduction of authority to its minimum, and the elevation of intelligence to its maximum. And accordingly, the theological evil in question is to be extinguished, not by the legal recommendation of creeds, or spontaneous submission to them, not by any creation of ecclesiastical privileges, national or voluntary, but simply by the exaltation of public sentiment, and the communication of public self-knowledge. Nothing must be done to degrade the right of individual judgment—much to augment the power.

Another cause of the poverty of theological science is found in the fatal association between mental error and moral turpitude. Take this fallacy by itself, and there is scarcely any form of malignity for which it may not be regarded as accountable. But in order to see its intellectual effects in theology, it must be viewed in connexion with another mistake—the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. In almost all other points, Christians have differed from each other; and the efforts of each party to collect all the evidence for its own opinions, like the one-sided eloquence of the bar, may terminate in

the elucidation of the truth ; and though the minds of the individual advocates may be injured by their professional habits, to the public the ends of theological justice may be finally obtained. But while the contents of the Bible have been eagerly discussed, its nature and character, though a preliminary topic of inquiry, have been little proved ; and notwithstanding many scholastic distinctions between different kinds of inspiration, it yet remains to be argued, whether the sacred writings are literally inspired at all. This point has hitherto, with singular unanimity, been taken for granted, and erected into an essential : it has been regarded as an inseparable element of a faith indispensable to salvation. Hence have resulted not only the vast mischief of untenable claims in behalf of the Scriptures, and a meagre appreciation of their real perfections, but a retardation of almost every species of knowledge which exercises the human mind. The Bible being regarded as a depository of all knowledge, its chronology, its physics, its logic, its pneumatology, even its Judaical institutions, were conceived to be faultless. This very error, which for ages sustained the faith of witchcraft, is at present occupied in combating physical science with the cosmogony of Moses, and extinguishing the philosophy of morals by the tradition of the fall.* What science has it not embarrassed ! Through what a host of difficulties, amid what a

* See Note B.

storm of hostility, had geology to struggle into existence! With what countless absurdities of speculation was it long encumbered, what incredible distortion of facts! And all, that the dates of the Old Testament might remain intact! And what has been the result? At length it is discovered that revelation is not interested in shewing that the globe has been created only 6000 years; and, as if to rebuke the narrow spirit that dreads the investigation of nature, as if to shew that the Creator is glorified by all knowledge, geology, while it has afforded no help to Deism, has given a fatal blow to Atheism. It has proved that the human species is a recent and sudden creation, and has not existed for ever, or been moulded by the gradual operation of merely material laws. It has laid distinctly bare to us the time when there was not a man on the earth: and thus, science itself has introduced us to the solemn moment, when the most magnificent and enduring of God's works was emerging fresh from the cloud of his power; when that most complex and delicate of organizations, the human body, and that most mysterious and beautiful of creations, the human soul, first stood erect beneath the heavens and on the earth, and drank in the spectacle of their glories. Astronomy, too, notwithstanding the noble elements it contributes to our conceptions of the divine infinitude, has not been permitted to make its discoveries unquestioned; and Newton's philosophy has been

assailed, lest we should have to alter our ideas of the six days' creation, and interpret afresh Joshua's command to the sun to stand still. And yet who that knows much of the young and intelligent, cannot testify to the power of this majestic science to quicken and elevate piety? How many holy thoughts have dropped from the heavens into the soul—thoughts as vast and still and solemn as their own midnight! How many boundless aspirings have ascended beneath the stars—aspirings as quenchless as those eternal fires!

Causes like these, by contracting the range, and lowering the tone of thought, have alienated theology from the respect of intellectual men; and a spirit of scepticism is diffusing itself among them, which all history proves to be unfavourable to the nobler forms both of morality and of genius. In this state of things society has now a deep interest, but for the future, a far deeper. The temper of which I speak cannot rest with the class in which it is now visible; by an irreversible law of the mental world, opinion has a downward gravitation; and, unless the process is arrested, Christianity must at length go out at the lower end of society. The shadow once upon the edge of the orb, who can forget, that it may creep on till the whole disk be blotted out?

Now, if the alienation of thinking men from Christianity were the result of such study as so grave a matter demands, a Christian might regret,

but could not censure, and ought not to interfere. But if it be only a hostility on the part of men of science to a system which has always been hostile to them; if it be only the disgust of refined philosophy towards the spirit of vulgar dogmatism; if it spring from the unhappy position in which theology has been placed by its abandonment to sectarian tribunals, then it is no time either for contentment or for despair. There must be no injustice done to truth; the gospel must not be allowed to glide out of men's minds on the surface of slippery errors not its own. And who are the fittest men to vindicate its character? Assuredly those who are not acted upon by the influences which have degraded it; those who see in it nothing to repress, but every thing to stimulate, the intellect, the imagination, the affections; who can place a generous faith in the adaptation of the human intellect to the attainment of knowledge, and feel that man can discover nothing which God has not previously made true; who can contemplate theology, not merely in its bearings on a creed, but as it lies on the great sphere of human knowledge; who can see how it is placed in the centre of the sciences, and holds affinities with all; how its chronological chain of documents links itself to the annals of every age; its traditions of the primeval globe invite confirmation or correction from the history or the philosophy of nature; its records of miracle touch on the rules of evidence and the theory of causation; its views of

life involve the principle of ethics; its doctrine of Providence, the troubled question of moral agency; its promise of futurity, the laws of the human mind, and the adjustments of human life. When men of this kind are encouraged by public sentiment to devote themselves to a free search into the resources of religious science; when high powers of intellect, attracted by the mysteries of nature, life and miracle, can speculate on them without compromise of mental liberty, or loss of moral sympathy, there will be better hopes for Christianity. But so long as minds that would thus take on themselves the vow of consecration are compelled, by a system of mental monachism, to incarcerate themselves in a miserable cell of thought, and listen only to the mutterings of superstition, blind to the glories of God's universe, and deaf to all its diviner harmonies, what wonder is it that genius recoils, and flies from this self-annihilation? The errors, then, which sustain this system must be removed: all association between guilt and any kind or degree of investigation must be broken; and the question respecting the nature of the Scriptures must be discussed. The agitation of these points is a prerequisite to the very existence of theology as a science; their settlement would effect in it a constitutional and organic reform, compared with which all particular grievances of doctrine are of little moment, and without which they cannot be redressed. Whatever public efforts may be made

for the diffusion of a system, it is to be hoped that those higher services to Christianity, those more philosophical modes of exhibiting it, will be increasingly cultivated, which are indispensable to its preservation in the superior orders of minds, and through them in society at large.

This adaptation of theology to the demands of studious men, forms, however, but a part of our duty to Christianity. The use of theology is to conduct to religion: within an envelopment of science there lie great principles of faith and morals; and the administration of these to the soul of society is the ultimate object which sanctifies research. It is the business of theology to discover them; to apply them, is that of religion. The two processes are related to one another, like the analytical and synthetical stages of physical science. The philosopher, by an examination of individual phenomena, and a detection of their mutual analogies, arrives at the knowledge of a general law; and then, with the aid of this key, proceeds to the interpretation of appearances before unintelligible, and the prediction of others before unknown. And the use which he makes of the events of the material universe, must the spiritual teachers of mankind make of the Scriptures and the moral creation; first, by careful analysis of them, rise to some simple and comprehensive principles, and then, by the power of these principles, solve the perplexities of duty, interpret the mysteries of Providence, trace the tendencies of

life, and prophesy the issues of futurity. The first of these processes must be abandoned to men of cultivation; and I have endeavoured to shew how future generations are interested in its speedy restoration to their guardianship. But the other process, the application of the great moral and devotional principles of the gospel to the living interests of mankind, is eminently popular; it is the business not of the student, but of the preacher, and of all institutions which aim at the general diffusion of religious influences; and on its wise conduct depends the character of the present, more than the faith of remoter times.

The attempts made in this country to bring controversy before popular tribunals, while they have made theology superficial, have rendered religion sectarian. There is very little soul-felt repose upon a venerated faith, very little free and earnest and simple application of any principles to the relations of individual or social life; but a restless, uneasy feeling, which vents itself in every class by enmity to others' creeds, and is little soothed by satisfaction with its own. The plea of mystery is still urged in behalf of the ancient doctrines; but it no longer receives a willing acquiescence: the plea of rationality defends our own faith; but with a success almost as dubious. Perhaps both are imperfectly adapted to the existing state of the general mind; the former, to its modes of thought; the latter, to its modes of feeling. Every age has its prevailing

character, its prevailing taste, which will influence even the most dissimilar forms of its literature; and any class of productions that pretends to alienate itself from this influence must share the fate of all that sits apart from the heart of society; it will be neglected first, and then despised. At the era of the reformation, the plea of mystery was nothing strange; men were accustomed to mysteries every where—in history, in science, in life; their principles of investigation had not been defined; their feelings of veneration had not yet settled on the true and ascertainable; the habit of submission to authority was but imperfectly broken; the awe which will always be given to the sublime, the infinite, the eternal, was yielded to the unintelligible; and when the appeal in religion was made to the mysterious, the loftiest minds of the age heard it and did it reverence, and delighted to repose on its imagined sanctity. Hence, the whole literature and speech of those times were pervaded by hearty allusions to the notions which needed this defence; they were not confined to the works of controversialists and priests; not abandoned to the exposition of professional believers; neither blazoned forth with the air of effrontery on the one hand, nor insinuated with timid apology on the other; but, like all ideas which are sincerely embraced, they assumed their natural place in the stock of general sentiment, and filled their natural proportion in its utterance. This state of things has long passed away. But it

does not follow, that because the minds of men are no longer satisfied with the mysterious, their hearts will be contented with the rational. They feel that, after the proof of a faith, must come its use; wearied of the eternal talk of the corruptions of religion, they entreat to be presented with its pure and fresh influences. They desire to reach the end of this long and hard theological ascent, and, resting on the elevation to which it should conduct them, gaze down on the outspread scenery of life and Providence, and watch the gliding of its shadows, and trace the streams of its mighty tendencies.

The sectarian state of theology in this country cannot but be regarded as eminently unnatural. Its cold and hard ministrations are entirely alien to the wants of the popular mind, which, except under the discipline of artificial influences, is always most awake to generous impressions. Its malignant exclusiveness is a perversion of the natural veneration of the human heart, which, except where it is interfered with by narrow and selfish systems, pours itself out, not in hatred towards any thing that lives, but in love to the invisible objects of trust and hope. Its disputatious trifling is an insult to the sanctity of conscience, which, except where it is betrayed into oblivion of its delicate and holy office, supplicates of religion, not a new ferocity of dogmatism, but an enlargement and refinement of its sense of right. It is the temper of sectarianism to seize on every deformity of every creed, and exhibit this

caricature to the world's gaze and aversion. It is the spirit of the soul's natural piety to alight on whatever is beautiful and touching in every faith, and take there its secret draught of pure and fresh emotion. It is the passages of poetry and pathos in a system, which alone can lay a strong hold on the general mind and give them permanence; and even the wild fictions which have endeared Romanism to the hearts of so many centuries possess their elements of tenderness and magnificence. The fundamental principle of one who would administer religion to the minds of his fellow-men should be, that all that has ever been extensively venerated must possess ingredients that are venerable. If, in the spirit of sectarianism, he sees nothing in it but absurdity, it only proves that he does not see it all; it must have an aspect, which he has not yet caught, that awes the imagination, or touches the affections, or moves the conscience; and those who receive it neither will nor should abandon it, till something is substituted, not only more consonant with the reason but more awakening to these higher faculties of soul. Hence, a rigid accuracy and logical penetration of mind, the power of detecting and exposing error, are not the only qualities needed by the religious reformer: and in a deep and reverential sympathy with human feelings, a quick perception of the great and beautiful, a promptitude to cast himself into the minds of others, and gaze through their eyes at the objects which they love, he will find the

instrument of the sublimest intellectual power. The precise logician may sit eternally in the centre of his own circle of correct ideas, and preach demonstrably the folly of the world's superstitions ; yet he will never affect the thoughts of any but marble-minded beings like himself. He disregards the fine tissue of emotions that clings round the objects which he so harshly handles ; and has yet to learn the art of preserving its fabric unimpaired, while he enfolds within it something more worthy for it to foster and adore.

As, then, it is to the moral and imaginative powers of the human mind that religion chiefly attaches itself, as it is by these that the want of it is most strongly felt, so is it to these that its ministrations should be, for the most part, addressed. While theologians are discussing the evidences of creeds, let teachers be conducting them to their applications. Let their respective resources of feeling and conception be unfolded before the soul of mankind ; let it be tried what mental energy they can inspire, what purity of moral perception infuse, what dignity of principle erect, what toils of philanthropy sustain. Thus would arise a new criterion of judgment between differing systems ; for that system must possess most truth, which creates the most intelligence and virtue. Thus would the deeper devotional wants of society be no longer mocked by the privilege of choice among a few captious, verbal, and precise forms of belief. Thus, too, would the

alienation which repels sect from sect give place to an incipient and growing sympathy; for when high intellect and excellence approach and stand in meek homage beneath the cross, how soon are the jarring voices of disputants hushed in the stillness of reverence! Who does not feel the refreshment, when some stream of pure poetry, like Heber's, winds into the desert of theology! when some flash of genius, like that of Chalmers, darts through its dull atmosphere! some strains of eloquence, like those of Channing, float from a distance on its heavy silence!

Such, then, are the objects which should be contemplated by those who, in the present times, aim at the reformation of religious sentiment: first, the elevation of theology as an intellectual pursuit; secondly, the better application of religion as a moral influence. Both these objects are directly or indirectly promoted by the Association, whose cause I am privileged to advocate. It aids the first, by the distribution of many a work, the production of such minds as must redeem theology from contempt. It advances the second, by establishing union and sympathy among those, whose first principles are in direct contradiction to all that is sectarian, and who desire only to emancipate the understanding from all that enfeebles, and the heart from all that narrows it. The triumph of its doctrines would be, not the ascendancy of one sect, but the

harmony of all. Let but the diversities which separate Christians retire, and the truths which they all profess to love advance to prominence, and, whatever may become of party names, our aims are fulfilled, and our satisfaction is complete. When faith in the paternity of God shall have kindled an affectionate and lofty devotion ; when the vision of immortality, imparted by Christ's resurrection, shall have created that spirit of duty which was the holiest inspiration of his life ; when the sincere recognition of human brotherhood shall have supplanted all exclusive institutions, and banded society together under the vow of mutual aid, and the hope of everlasting progress,—our work will be done, our reward before us, and our little community of reformers lost in the wide fraternity of enlightened and benevolent men.

That day is yet distant, and can be won only by the toil of earnest and faithful minds. In the mean while, it is no light solace to see that the tendencies of Providence are towards its accelerated approach. And however dispiriting may sometimes be the variety and conflicts of human sentiment—however remote the dissonance of controversy from that harmony of will which would seem essential to perfected society, it is through this very process that the great ends of improvement are to be attained. Hereafter it will be seen, much more clearly than we can see it now, that opinion generates know-

ledge. Like the ethereal waves, whose inconceivable rapidity and number are said to impart the sensation of vision, the undulations of opinion are speeding on to produce the perception of truth : they are the infinitely complex and delicate movements of that universal Human Mind, whose quiescence is darkness—whose agitation, light.

NOTE. *

NOTE B., p. 12.

THE allusion is to Dr. Wardlaw's recent work, entitled "Christian Ethics." The leading idea of this publication is, that almost all that the world has yet seen under the name of moral science is radically unsound, because it has overlooked the depravity which the fall of Adam entailed upon his race; and that human nature is not in a condition to yield any moral philosophy at all. The originality of this idea, its exhibition in a tangible form of the obvious hostility of orthodoxy to science, and the striking illustration which the volume containing it affords of some of the foregoing remarks on English theology, tempt me to a few comments on the reasonings by which it is supported.

Moral philosophy is correctly described by Dr. Wardlaw, as founded upon an analysis of human nature: for it is necessary to understand the constitution of that spiritual system, the healthy performance of whose functions we seek to secure. Into this analysis, the fact of human depravity is represented as introducing "two distinct sources of error." Man, in the pursuit of moral science, being both the investigator, and the subject of investigation,—one source of error arises from "the influence of his depravity on his character as an investigator; and another from the disposition to make his own nature, without

* Omit, in p. 6, reference to Note A.

adverting to its fallen state, his standard of moral principles, and his *study* in endeavouring to ascertain them."

(1.) It is said that the investigating mind being corrupt, all its processes are liable to be vitiated. "A corrupt tendency has been infused into all his speculations and reasonings; so that, on every point that relates to religion and virtue, his conclusions are not, without great caution, to be depended upon." It is pronounced "preposterous to commit the decision of an inquiry respecting the true principles of *moral rectitude*, to a creature subject to all the blinding and perverting influences of *moral pravity*." Dr. W. uses this principle to prove that philosophers are incapable, in virtue of their apostate nature, of forming scientific judgments, of perceiving natural relations, or of applying criteria of duty. System after system is passed under review, and dismissed as worthless, because, whatever rule of duty it adopts, that rule has to be conducted to its application by a mind already corrupt. If we pronounce that to be right, which is in accordance with nature, how can a being whose nature is out of order be intrusted with such a principle? If that which is approved by the moral sense, how escape the perversions arising from the disorder of the moral sense? If that which produces the greatest amount of happiness, how can we rely on the computations of a judgment whose views of happiness are totally distorted?

Comprehensive as Dr. W.'s dissatisfaction is with human reasoning on ethical and religious subjects, it must surely be carried a little further: the application of his principle is not exhausted. The taint of pravity must be universal; it cannot affect some processes of thought, and exempt others; it must introduce the element of error into *all* our moral reasonings, and among others, into that by which the existence of natural corruption is discovered. The human being is depraved while occupied in proving his own pravity; and this proof is therefore as little deserving of confidence as any other exercise of his faculties. If they are incompetent to other offices of ratiocination on their own character and condition, they are for the same reason incompetent to this; and the philosopher, in defence of his ethics, may as justly plead the corruption of the divine, as

the divine, in defence of his theology, the corruption of the philosopher. The proof of the worthlessness of the opposing systems is at all events mutual.

It is in vain to say, that the doctrine of human corruption does not depend upon any exercise of the mental powers, but possesses the higher authority of inspiration. This only removes the difficulty a little farther back. For the doctrine of inspiration is itself only a result of previous reasonings, and is exposed to all the uncertainties of their fallibility. The Scriptures either claim to be inspired, or they do not. If they do not, no one can, without absurdity, prefer the claim for them. If they do, the pretension must be justified by proving their credibility; this involves the establishment of their authenticity; and this rests upon the attestation of numerous witnesses, whose character and circumstances must be investigated, and the authenticity of whose alleged writings must be evinced, before their testimony can be accepted. This golden link of inspiration, then, does but terminate a concatenation of purely human reasonings, and can sustain no weight which they will not bear. To it, either as a conclusion, or as a source of further deductions, there must attach precisely the degree of credit or discredit which may belong to the natural judgments which are its premises. The case, then, stands thus. In the department of philosophy we have the mind engaged in analyzing the constitution and faculties of man; in the department of theology, we have the same mind engaged in analyzing that complicated historical evidence which, through the successive steps of the authenticity, the credibility, the inspiration of the Scriptures, is supposed to establish the fallen condition of human nature. A corrupt state of the investigating mind cannot be urged against the one process, without equally invalidating the other. A maniac may commit as many fallacies in proving his own mania as in disproving it.

On the principle of the foregoing reasoning it would follow, that inspiration can never be pleaded in behalf of any doctrine which is contradicted by natural evidence. Suppose that apparent inspiration teaches the simultaneous creation of man and of all the other organisms of the globe; suppose that

science teaches that the origin of the human species was later, by an incalculable period, than certain earlier forms of animal life. The conclusion of the geologist rests upon physical evidence: he finds amid the ruins of the world's ancient structure, traces of a long interval between the birth of the first and that of the last of its living inhabitants; there are phenomena, that is, which, on the principle that like consequents have like antecedents, require this interval for their cause. The conclusion of the theologian rests on historical evidence; its base is in that mass of testimony on which inspiration itself is thrown back for its authority; he finds in that testimony traces of honesty and competency; there are appearances, that is, which, on the principle that like consequents have like antecedents, require these qualities for their cause. Of course, as the conclusions are different, there must be a fallacy somewhere; but that the philosophy is wrong and the theology right, we cannot affirm, unless it can be shewn that the physical evidence comprises sources of error from which the moral evidence is exempt. The difficulty cannot be set at rest by saying, that the attestation of God is superior to that of human reasoning; the very existence of this divine attestation being itself a deposition given in by human reason. The true state of mind in such a case is a state of doubt, until the point shall be discovered at which the false step of argument has been taken.

In his last lecture, Dr. W. has treated fully this imagined opposition of divinity and science; but he has given a verdict in the case, against which all lovers of truth, to whichever party their sympathies may incline, will, I think, do well to protest. While he censures the philosopher for his inattention to the claims of Scripture, he excuses the divine from all obligation to listen to the reasoning of the philosopher. It is not his business, we are assured, "to harmonize the discoveries of the inspired document with the dogmata of the philosopher; but it is incumbent on the philosopher, unless he can fairly meet and set aside the proofs of its inspiration, to bring his dogmata to the test of the document." The duty of the theologian, after having established the authority of his standard, is to regard it, on all matters of which it treats, as the only philosophy, and to demand implicit faith, without gainsaying, to its decisions. But can any

one fail to perceive, that the process by which the divine "establishes the authority of his standard," is only co-ordinate in certainty with that by which the philosopher establishes his truth; and the tenets cannot receive from "the standard" a certainty greater than its own. Hence, although entirely agreeing with Dr. W. in lamenting the indifference of men of science to the claims of Revelation, and thinking that there is both ignorance and bigotry in the contempt with which they have occasionally treated these claims, I cannot see how theology can be held innocent of precisely a similar offence against philosophy. The evil can never be cured by claims on implicit belief, which in both parties are arrogant alike. Each must spare a little attention for the researches of the other, but they can never meet in sympathy, till it be on equal terms.

(2.) The second source of error in ethical science arises from the corruption of human nature, considered as the thing investigated. The nature analyzed, it is said, being depraved, the philosophy deduced from that analysis is undeserving of reliance. The following considerations may assist us in estimating the force of this objection.

Moral philosophy proposes, as its end, the perfection of man as a voluntary being; it aims at the creation of a perfect system of voluntary action, and such an adjustment of the internal dispositions as will best secure it. For this purpose, two processes are necessary:

1. An enumeration must be made of all the actions and dispositions of the human being; they are the materials from which we have to select and discard, and we must have an arranged list of them. The catalogue must be in our hands, before the index expurgatorius is made out. In other words, the human mind must be analyzed, and its faculties and affections be disposed in some order for classification. This, however, is only preliminary to the great business of moral philosophy; it belongs rather to mental than to ethical science, and is of use in the latter, only as it facilitates the orderly examination of the several actions and dispositions, on whose relative excellence it is the office of morals to pronounce.

2. Having placed before him the total number of disposi-

tions and actions, it is the next task of the investigator to pass them severally in review, and estimate their values. In order to effect this, he must determine on some test or measure of moral value, which may be run successively through them all, and decide their position in the moral scale. The different tests or criteria of duty, as they are called, which different writers have adopted, have given rise to the various systems of moral philosophy;—one author trying every act and affection by its tendency to the happiness of the agent, another by its tendency to the happiness of others, another by its tendency to both; a fourth, by its conformity with the moral sense, a fifth by its congruity with nature, or its accordance with the relations of things. But, whatever rule of judgment be adopted, the object is to select those forms of conduct whose qualities are the best, and combine them into one view of perfect human action and affection.

Now, suppose human nature to be corrupt; which of these two researches would thus be vitiated? This corruption can be conceived of only under three forms. It must either have obliterated entirely some good affection, or introduced some evil one; or, without altering the number of principles in the mind, have raised the inferior ones to an injurious ascendancy over the rest.

If the whole number remains the same, or if it has been increased by the accession of some evil propensity, the complete list can evidently still be made out for examination; the analysis of human nature may be perfect. Nor is there any thing to prevent the moral valuation of this list from proceeding as correctly as before. The tests of eligibility which were applied to actions and dispositions may be applied again with precisely the same success; and to assert that the deteriorated quality of those actions and dispositions incapacitates them for undergoing estimate, is to say, that the rules by which we approve the good cannot be applied to the condemnation of the bad. It may indeed be urged, that one of the tests of goodness, viz. conformity with the moral sense, may be rendered worthless by a corruption, from which this faculty itself is not exempt. But this objection affects the mind, regarded as the valuator, not as being the object of valuation; it tends to prove the incompe-

tency of the philosopher to conducting his examination, not the incapacity of mankind for undergoing examination. And this form of objection has been already considered.

If the depravity has extinguished some good faculty of the human mind, that faculty either is now attainable, or it is not. If it is not, it is no proper object of cognizance to the moral philosopher, who has to do only with the voluntary part of our nature; and it would be as absurd in him to recommend it, as to exhort men to possess themselves of corporeal immortality, which (with it) is supposed to have been a part of the paradisaical state. If it be attainable, it must have been attained, and be discoverable somewhere. Minds are surely to be found which contain this supplementary faculty, and present it to the investigation of the philosopher. If he should be so unhappy as not to possess it himself, it is certainly his duty to examine its manifestations in others, to place it in his enumeration of possible human dispositions, and to appreciate it with impartiality. But no reason can be alleged, why the absence of this quality, whatever it be, from some minds, should prevent a just estimate of its worth in those in whom it exists.

I have noticed Dr. Wardlaw's objection to moral philosophy in its most abstract form, because I confess myself unable to understand his illustrations of it, or at least to reconcile them either with one another, or with any idea, not wholly erroneous, of the nature and objects of moral science. He appears to regard the whole business of ethics, in consisting in that which I have mentioned as its preliminary step,—in a process of mental analysis, a decomposition of the compound mind, and a statement of its elementary tendencies. He forgets its subsequent and chief office, of rejecting the evil tendencies and choosing the good, and speaks as if moralists were in the habit of turning all the sinfulness of mankind into their moral systems, and taking the average of human character as the standard of moral perfection! This mode of conception appears in the following passage: "How can any thing but error and confusion, or, at best, mingled and partial truth, be the result of an attempt to discover the principles of moral rectitude from the constitution of a depraved nature?—to extract a pure system of ethics from the elements of corruption?—to found the super-

structure of moral science on the scattered and unstable rubbish of fallen humanity?

"Let me illustrate my meaning by a simple comparison:—Suppose a chemist were desirous to ascertain the ingredients of water; what estimate should we form of his judgment, if, with this view, he were to subject to his analysis a quantity of what had just passed, in the bed of a sluggish river, through the midst of a large manufacturing city, from whose common sewers, and other outlets of impurity, it had received every possible contamination which, either by simple admixture or by chemical affinity, had become incorporated with the virgin purity of the fountain; and if, proceeding on such analysis, he were to publish to the world his *thesis* on the composition of water? Little less preposterous must be the conduct of those philosophers who derive their ideas of what constitutes rectitude in morals, from human nature *as it is*. They analyze the water of the polluted river, and refuse the guide that would conduct them to the mountain spring of its native purity."

If the chemist were required to analyze the mountain spring, he would certainly be sufficiently foolish to take his sample from the city stream; and if the moralist were required to state the composition of an angel, or write essays on the intellectual and active powers of Adam and Eve, he would be equally unwise to take as their representatives the present inhabitants of the world. But if some further object were in view than the gratification of scientific curiosity; if the chemist happened to concern himself with the health of the citizens, and proposed to investigate the source of their diseases, so far as they might be connected with the water in daily use, he would deserve their thanks for submitting to his tests a specimen from a neighbouring river, and presenting to them, if needs be, his thesis upon it; and though he might not be able to tell them how many ingredients would be found at the fountain head, and how many had been acquired from subsequent admixture, he would set himself to the more useful task of determining, by experiment and observation, which were deleterious and which salubrious to animal life. And in like manner the moralist, aiming at the detection of poisonous elements in the spiritual condition of mankind, must take that condition as it is, tabulate all its constituents; and instead of perplexing himself with the ques-

tion, how many of them have descended from the outside, and how many from the inside of the gate of paradise, endeavour to discern which of them tend to the well-being, and which to the peril of his kind. Does Dr. Wardlaw really believe philosophical morality to be desirable only from the analysis of the souls of our first parents? As well surely might Plato have derived his ethics from the fancied laws which governed his world of pre-existent souls. At all events, it is difficult to see why those whom Dr. W. regards as regenerate and elect, in whom the original perfection of human nature is conceived to be restored, may not afford to the moral analyst the immaculate samples which his object requires.

I cannot deny myself the relief of expressing, before I conclude this note, the melancholy feeling with which I closed this volume of Dr. Wardlaw's. I was before convinced of the general disfavour with which the advocates of the popular theology regard all the higher departments of intellectual pursuit. But when a divine, held in deserved esteem for acuteness, learning, and worth, one whose powers and attainments might be expected to refine and ameliorate the tendencies of his creed, was found to be the unabashed and honest apologist of an antipathy so fatal, the conviction was forced upon me with a new and sad reality. The discourses which compose this volume were delivered at the Congregational Library, in London,—an institution recently established by the Independents, "with a view to the promotion of ecclesiastical, theological, and biblical literature" in that religious connexion. They form the first of a series of endowed annual Lectures, designed to call forth the varied talent and resources of the congregational preachers, and to emulate the Boyle, the Warburton, and the Bampton Lectures. The design is worthy and dignified; but it is a sad comment on the temper of English religion, that the very first of these imposing literary efforts is an attempt to extinguish the philosophy of morals, and to add the sentiment of theological horror to that mercenary aversion which already prevails towards a study so truly ennobling, but so little profitable.

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A RATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL RELIGION THE ONE THING NEEDFUL:

93/5

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL,

IN

LITTLE PORTLAND STREET, REGENT STREET,

ON

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10th, 1835,

BEING THE

TENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BY HENRY ACTON.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—St. PAUL.

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SERMON.

LUKE x. 42:

"BUT ONE THING IS NEEDFUL; AND MARY HATH CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART, WHICH SHALL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER."

THIS was said by Jesus to one of the sisters of Lazarus concerning the other. It is commonly supposed that, by *the one thing needful*, he meant the cultivation of true religion, as taught in his own gospel. Taken in this sense, as Dr. Doddridge observes, it is "one of the gravest and most important maxims that ever was uttered." But some commentators have understood the words in a much lower sense: according to them, Jesus only meant to tell Martha, that one preparation of food alone was necessary for his refreshment. There are no critical grounds whatever, for preferring this to the higher signification. The context will not determine the sense either way. There is good reason to believe, therefore, that the popular understanding of the passage may be correct, and that Christ did mean, in this emphatic language, to assert the great necessity of religion, in its purest state, to the highest moral improvement and

greatest happiness of mankind. The other supposition may be only one of the many instances, in which the mere possibility and speciousness of a different interpretation have misled the judgments of ingenious commentators.

Now, this saying of our Lord, so understood, is one of those brief maxims of a simple and profound wisdom, which, to all reflecting minds, are apt to *suggest* more than they *express*. It will admit, it seems almost to invite, amplification. Being settled in our convictions, that religion in general is the one thing needful, may we not, without presumption, inquire into the particular character of that religion which is naturally *most* needful, and *best*, "for us men and for our salvation"? May we not endeavour to seek out the fundamental principles, the essential qualities and tendencies, of that religion which is most urgently required by man, because felt to be needful for the full development and satisfaction of all his highest capacities; needful for the establishment of an entire moral harmony and peace in his soul; in short, for his perfect reconciliation with God and fitness for the enjoyment of eternal pleasures? This is the inquiry which I would humbly propose to my intelligent hearers on the present occasion. I am very well aware, that I am addressing some, indeed not a few, whose ability for conducting such an investigation is so much greater than my own, that I shall need all their indulgence while they listen to me; but I am supported by the persuasion that I shall undoubtedly receive their indulgence. Let us enter upon our inquiry, my brethren, in a serious and earnest spirit, looking

rather into our own hearts and consciences, than into the systems of theologians, for a satisfactory answer.

It may be objected, perhaps, that in pursuing such an investigation, we are travelling into the regions of speculation in search of a religion which is not to be found. It may be alleged that there *is* no *one* religion, which is, at all times, in all circumstances, needful and best for man; but that on the contrary, very different religions, as the Jewish, the Christian, the Catholic, the Protestant, and even the Pagan, have been found suitable and beneficial for men, in different ages and circumstances of the world. This is true, and a truth which deserves more attention than it has often received. But I reply to it, as an objection to our present inquiry, that it is true only of the accidental *modes* and *forms* of religion, not of its essential *principles.* It is true only of the best methods of embodying and expressing the spiritual principles of religion; the best means of cherishing and manifesting religious sentiments; the most expedient ways of practically discharging religious obligations. We shall err greatly, if we apply it to these principles, sentiments, and obligations themselves; for these, like the infinite nature of God, and the created natue of man, and the moral relations between God and man, in which they all have their foundation, are unchangeably the same. This will be allowed by all who thoroughly consider the subject. If there was much good in the Jewish religion, if there was some good in the heathen religion, it was because these systems did, to a certain extent, comprise the same eternal principles of truth and piety, did serve to

awaken the same pure, kind, and heavenly emotions, did encourage the practice of the same great moral duties, as Christianity itself, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Nay, more. If the gospel itself contains infinitely more good than all other forms of religion conbined, it is only because the gospel reveals with so much more fulness than any other religion, reveals in greater purity and with greater power, those moral and spiritual truths which are inwardly witnessed to by the understanding, the heart, and the conscience of man. In a word, moral truth which has reference to the fixed capacities and wants of the human soul, and to the settled relations between God and his accountable offspring, can have "no variableness neither shadow of turning," any more than physical truth which has reference to the settled properties and laws of the material universe.

There appears, then, to be no solid objection to the inquiry in which we are about to engage. It may be undertaken without folly or presumption. It may lead us onwards, if it should not absolutely bring us, to conclusions in the highest degree interesting and important. I cannot but think that by freely consulting our own consciousness, with the lessons of six thousand years of human experience lying open before us, after all which philosophy has at length established concerning the essential capabilities of the human mind, and the necessary grounds of human virtue and happiness, above all, with the divine promptings of the gospel to guide and assist us, we may fairly hope to make some approaches towards a sound and comprehensive settlement of this high question. And having done this, we may further hope to

derive the greatest satisfaction, from comparing the principles of our common Christianity, particularly of Christianity as we view it, with this essentially needful religion.

1. Permit me, then, to suggest to this audience, in the first place, that man needs a religion which may bring all good and complacent *affections* powerfully into operation in his soul. I set this first in the order of our considerations, because I am persuaded that it *is* first in the order of truth and nature. What an *affection* or a sentiment is, as distinguished from other states of mind, it were tedious in me to attempt to inform you. If you did not know it already, you would learn it from one moment's self-introspection, better than I could instruct you in an hour's discoursing. The moral and intellectual manifestations of the mind are happily clear enough, both from consciousness and observation, however hidden may be the nature and constitution of the mind itself. We are all endowed with, or we are all subject to, certain affections and sentiments, the exercise of which is felt to be attended with different results to our happiness, according to the character of the sentiment. Fear, anger, suspicion, hatred, are painful and degrading emotions. They contribute nothing to our own felicity. They recommend us not at all to the approbation of one another. The prevalence of these sentiments in the heart is misery. The temporary excitement of them is just so much interruption of the mind's peace and pleasure. We make no doubt, indeed, that the capacities in which all these feelings originate were given us by God for the wisest purposes. We do not account them, as some may, to be

signs of inborn corruption: we look on them as propensities given to fit us for our present mode of existence on earth, and to defend us, when properly exercised, from even greater evils. But veneration, gratitude, esteem, confidence, love, are naturally and in themselves good, pleasing, and dignifying sentiments. Happiness resides in the calm, perpetual consciousness of these feelings. Our happiness is not in mere intellectual notions, any more than in mere external possessions. Our happiness is in certain complacent *affections* of the heart, personal, devout, and social. Even the satisfaction we derive from the exercise of our strictly intellectual faculties, whether of the observing, reflecting, or imaginative order, is to be chiefly accounted for in this manner. There may be a certain kind of enjoyment attending properly on the mere acquisition of truth and knowledge. This may arise from the grateful activity of the mental powers; as there is pleasure in the moderate activity of our bodily limbs. But if these intellectual acquirements are ever felt,—as assuredly they often are,—to conduce to real happiness, it must be because the truth and wisdom thus gathered in by the mind, serve powerfully to awaken those *sentiments* of which I am treating; which sentiments, whether or not they are *consequent* states of mind, are in all cases perfectly *distinct* states of mind, from simply perceiving, judging, and believing. If knowledge, or faith, in whatever way attained, leads to true happiness, it must be because it leads us to admire, to revere, to venerate, to hope, to love. In the predominance of such *feelings*, all proper happiness, nearly all human greatness and goodness, consists.

We maintain, then, that man needs a religion which may have power to bring these good and complacent *affections* of his nature into full and settled operation. This must be the unfailing tendency of that true religion which is to be valued by its ultimate fruits—"love, joy, peace." Here, in the heart, is its dwelling place. Here, in the heart, is the seat of its empire. It is essentially a state of the *affections.* In its simplest elements it is veneration for wisdom and greatness, and love for moral goodness. In its most perfected state, it is but the same good and holy affections, more fully developed, engaged upon higher and more worthy conceptions of their objects, working more intensely in the soul, and strongly influencing all the dispositions and actions of the religious man. If we analyse true religion, not as it is represented in books and systems, but as it is seen in the human character, until we arrive at the discovery of its basis, we shall find that it is, not a notion of the intellect, but a sentiment of the heart. Let me not be mistaken. Nothing is more rational than true religion; and on this part of the subject I shall speak presently. But some things of this kind have been said, which may have appeared justly liable to objection. If any departed worthies, the excellent of the earth in their day, when zealously contending for rational views of Christianity, in opposition to the absurdities of popular creeds, ever intended to maintain that religion is primarily, or chiefly, a manifestation of the *reason* of man, distinctively so called, that is, of the understanding, of the intellectual and rational faculties, rather than of the sentiments and affections, (I do not

affirm, for I do not suppose, that they ever did mean this, but if they did) surely we ought to allow that they were mistaken. The voice of all experience, the teaching of all Scripture, the secret witness of our own souls, is against taking such a view of the peculiar seat of true religion in human nature. Just reasoning may do much to aid in the establishment and purification of religious principles. "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." Truth is to be sought after and purchased as the pearl of great price. Ignorance, superstition, and error, may so pervert religion, as that it may become a very dubious good, if not an absolute evil. But no measure, no kind of knowledge, no discoveries, no exercises of reason, can alone constitute religion; whereas it may be safely affirmed, that a certain state of the affections does constitute true religion in the character, and will lead to the practice of it in the life; even in the midst of the thickest darkness or wildest aberrations of the mere intellect. It is plain, therefore, in what parts of our spiritual nature religion has its primary and chief operation.

Here also, let me observe, has been the natural origin of religion. That which is now seen to be its chosen home was first its birth-place. History testifies, that mankind have not first deliberately reasoned themselves into a conviction of the great doctrines of theism, have not first coolly persuaded themselves that it is their duty or their interest to be religious, and then made themselves religious accordingly. The true process has been very different. Their minds have been first irresistibly impressed, moved, awed,

delighted, by the countless indications of power, and wisdom, and goodness, discernible in themselves and all things around them. These simple impressions have awakened the sentiment of a profound and mysterious veneration in their bosoms, as naturally as light and sound produce visible and audible effects on the mind through the senses. These *feelings* have pointed to a God, as directly as our mere sensations point to an external universe.

But what, according to these views, is the most needful kind of religion for man? It must be, as we have said, a religion adapted to cherish powerfully his best affections,—the sentiments of devout reverence, lively gratitude, and confiding love. All that is most vital and profitable in every form of religion must be sought here. Whatever recommendations any system of doctrine may be thought to have, from its simplicity, its reasonableness, its correct agreement with the letter of Scripture, if it be wanting in these good influences on the affections, which is the spirit of Scripture, it is "as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." Destitute of these sentiments, the heart of man, religiously considered, is dead,—as it were a sapless tree, a land in which there are no streams. Let *us* not fear,—as Unitarians, I solemnly believe, we have no occasion to fear,—the fullest admission of this principle. We are persuaded, I trust, on the sure grounds of experience, that our particular views of Christianity, our thoughts of God, of Christ, of salvation, and of immortality, are not deficient in this necessary power of awakening good and holy affections. We say nothing of ourselves, the living pro-

fessors of these doctrines. It may be, that on the altar of our hearts the fire from heaven has not yet descended; and if it be so, may God, who knoweth all things, hear our prayers and give it quickly. But whatever be our own case, no denial of sectarian-minded men should ever cause us to forget, in how many instances, perhaps in those now departed this life, revered friends and brethren, we may all have seen these affections kindled by the power of these views, and the blessings of sanctity and peace attend upon their presence.

One thing is certain,—we should never fall into error on this point, if we were content to follow heartily the guidance of the gospel. When all the world shall have sufficient spiritual discernment, all the world will see, that in nothing is the surpassing wisdom and excellence of Christianity more strongly displayed, than in its making a *sentiment,* the best and most complacent of all human sentiments, the essential principle of true religion. Consider, my brethren, if we were required to tell what single argument proves Christianity to be divine,—could we return a juster answer than this? Christianity is divine, because it reveals *Love* as the first of all the commandments, the fulfilling of the moral law of God, the spirit of all sincere and acceptable piety, and of all true social virtue. *This* is what we need. He is spiritually passed from death unto life who *loveth,* as Christ taught men to love, not by precept only, but also by example; loveth all good and holy things, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible; loveth God with all his heart, and his neigh-

bour as himself, God for his infinite goodness, and man for the image which he bears of God in the immortal capacities of his soul. He, whose religion has this influence upon him, is saved with a sure salvation from all wilful sin; for no unrighteous thought or feeling shall come near to touch the heart in which this celestial fire of *love* burns purely, but it shall be instantaneously and utterly consumed.

In conclusion of this topic, it must be added that it is not the bare commandment to love which we need, so much as the efficient stimulants and provocatives to the exercise of this cardinal good affection. The injunction alone, though it were to be hourly repeated, and every hour with some fresh signs of its authority from heaven, could never produce the sentiment. We must be furnished with just and enlarged conceptions, with deep and vivid impressions, of "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely." We must be brought to see, to feel, that God *is* venerable and adorable, a Father in heaven unto all his people; that man *is* our brother, entitled to all fraternal sympathies; that virtue is no shadow, but a substantial reality, the only true glory whose brightness outshines that of "thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers." The religion which can *make* us feel thus, is the religion that we most need for the highest spiritual cultivation of our nature.

2. In the second place, man needs a religion which may solemnly awaken and impress his *conscience*. We require to be guided and assisted, in the cultivation of personal holiness, and in the work of pure, righteous, and beneficent living. On this point

we shall encounter no serious difference of opinion. Not to trouble you with doubtful disputations, I will take the liberty of assuming, that all men are susceptible of certain *moral* feelings, moral sentiments or dictates, call them by whatever name you please. They are not bare *ideas* of the understanding, relating to matters of fact, to questions of truth, nor to the mere useful or hurtful tendencies of actions. They are not simply painful or pleasing emotions, like the affections treated of under the last head. They are as clearly distinguishable, in the mind's own consciousness, from all these states of feeling, as from mere bodily sensations. So at least it appears to me, with all deference for the judgments of those who think otherwise. They are *moral* feelings, having the peculiar qualities of *moral* good and evil, right and wrong, for their immediate objects. Every line of human history, almost every incident of daily life, proves that all men have this faculty and these feelings, whether natural or acquired.

Now, it must evidently be a most imperfect and unsuitable religion for man, which does not directly tend, by some mighty moral influences on his conscience, to strengthen, refine, and cultivate these feelings. It is by such means alone that his whole life and character can be rendered righteous. We need, especially, a religion which is invested with this purifying, sanctifying power, having its fruits unto holiness. I am not disposed to argue, that either the rule or the obligation of all virtue is to be sought only in the express will of God, considered as such. It rather appears to me, that the wise Father of our

spirits has been pleased to make us capable of much virtue, without this immediate necessary reference to his will, as the sole standard of right and the sole ground of obligation. It seems very possible for men to be just, temperate, and benevolent, without first being religious—as the necessary basis of all this morality. Some Christians, I know, will smile contemptuously at this opinion. They will pronounce all such natural virtues to be nothing better than "splendid sins;" as indeed they will pronounce of all virtue, which is not wrought under the influence of their peculiar faith, even though it be performed out of a sincere regard to the will of God. But my present hearers will judge a more righteous judgment in this matter. *We* are happily not under any temptation, to aim such a deadly blow at all the natural moral sentiments and instincts of the human mind, for the sake of upholding a set of theological opinions. We may believe, nevertheless, that man has moral and spiritual powers, capabilities of holiness and goodness, which cannot be fully developed so as to have their perfect work, but which must wither and decay, without the fostering influences of a pure religion and the heavenly aids of piety. Religion is needful to the perfect moral growth, beauty, and maturity, of the human soul; though not perhaps absolutely necessary to its moral existence. Many trees, many flowers, will *exist* barely, when brought from their native tropical climates to these northern regions of the earth. But we find that they will not attain perfection in these unfavourable circumstances; they are seen to be dwarfish; their natural grace and beauty are vanish-

ed; their fruits never ripen. Now, we think there is a similar imperfection, and as it were abortiveness, in the soul of man, when he is wholly deprived of the genial light and warmth of religion on the development of his peculiarly moral faculties.

There are two obvious essentials of the religion which is needed to supply this spiritual want of our nature. The one is negative, the other positive. First, there must be no discrepancy between its doctrines, or its precepts, and those natural sentiments of rectitude and goodness, of which we have already spoken. If there be, the religion in which such discrepancy is found, will so far not tend to purify, will not avail to improve, it will only serve to darken, to disturb, to perplex the conscience. We shall all agree to this, if we only take instances of which we can judge without prejudice. Men have believed, for example, that the gods whom they worshiped were lustful and revengeful beings, delighting in impurity, cruelty, and blood. Can we suppose that such a religion had power to render men holy, humane, and merciful? No; there could be no purifying, no humbling, no softening influences in such a religion; nor could it ever be believed and followed by men in true satisfaction of soul. Holy Nature may doubtless be over-ruled for a time, and for a purpose. Her voice may be stifled, at moments, in the tumult of superstitious fears and fanatical emotions; as the cries of the human victims, sometime offered up to idol deities, are said to have been drowned in the noise of barbarian music. But occasionally, fitfully, the voice of Nature will be heard, above this stormy din of hu-

man passions, pleading aloud for justice and for mercy! Nor is it possible, that any religion which wars with the holiest and most gracious dictates of the human heart, should be "*the one thing needful*" for the highest moral cultivation of our nature. We may apply this test, with advantage, to creeds of a later date, and of a more subtle character, than those which blinded and hardened the consciences of the poor heathen. Man's natural feelings of rectitude, kindness, and piety, are his noblest distinctions. To labour for the suppression of these, or even to treat them lightly, out of some fancied homage to divine truth, is most deluded rebellion against the most undoubted authority of Heaven. It is, first to rob the heart, as far as in us lies, of all which makes it a holy and acceptable offering unto God, and then to lay it on his altars, a mutilated and a spotted sacrifice.

I have said there are *two* essentials of the religion which is so much needed for our moral purification. The second is positive. Besides being entirely free from all opposition to the good natural sympathies of the heart and conscience, this religion must be in all respects wisely calculated to improve men in the ways of practical holiness. To this end, all the divine contemplations which it inspires, all the views which it sanctions of the moral government of heaven, all the convictions, feelings, imaginations even, (for the imagination, when rightly exercised, is a most powerful aid in the moral culture of the heart, and religion is needed to conduct the imagination, in her loftiest flights, to regions of infinite grandeur and beauty,) these must be pure and righteous altogether. They

must constitute an element of holy thought and feeling, in which the soul of the devout believer may have its spiritual life, every moment inhaling and breathing goodness. The representations which this religion gives of the attributes and ways of God, must be of such a character that every serious recollection of Him, every prayer, every silent aspiration, that ascends to His presence, may have power to cleanse the heart through which it passes. Its views of the nature and consequences of sin, must deeply humble the penitent soul, whilst they cause the impenitent to fear and tremble. Above all, it must insist on the absolute necessity of personal obedience, in order to salvation; according to that wise maxim of the Scriptures, "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." Nothing must be suffered to interfere with, to confuse or to weaken, these impressions of the necessity of personal righteousness; no schemes of substitution, no fictions of the divine law, no dreams of mere transferrable and conventional righteousness. Finally, this religion must create a deep sense of imperfection and personal unworthiness in the sight of God; that the heart of the believer, conscious of its own frailty, may turn meekly to him for mercy and support; in all its trials and in all its conflicts with sin, seeking to have its goodness nourished by "the healthful spirit of his grace, the continual dew of his blessing." Then, whatever degree of righteousness is attained, will at least not be Pharisaical righteousness, but of that humble and sincere kind which our Saviour commends. Such a religion will operate in all its influences, by its doctrines, precepts, examples, pro-

mises, to refresh and regenerate our moral nature, that by perpetual growth in true virtue and piety, through the help of God, we may be rendered like unto him, as dear children.

3. In the third place allow me to observe, that man needs a religion which may entirely accord with his *reason*. We require of religion, both permission and encouragement for the free exercise of all our intellectual powers. It will have been seen, that I wish to keep a distinction, in the present discourse, between the reason or understanding, properly so called, and the sentiments or affections; in other words, between the head and the heart. By the exercise of our *intellectual* faculties, we acquire knowledge and discern truth. You will suffer me to remind you, as bearing immediately on my present subject, that it is not the *material* universe alone, which is thus the object of human knowledge. The intellectual, moral, and spiritual world itself, lies open to our researches. We are hereby constituted, not only sensitive, not only moral, but also *rational* beings, capable of discriminating *truth* from error, of receiving and comparing ideas, and judging of their agreement or incongruity. In short, by these faculties we acquire knowledge, wisdom, experience, science, philosophy, reaching to all the departments of nature, physical and moral. It is these results of our strictly intellectual faculties, which seem to be alone comprehended under the name of *reason*, concerning the insufficiency of which, and even its supposed inconsistency with religion, so many strange things have been uttered. I have already expressed my humble conviction, that these capacities are not

the principal seat of religion in human nature. In the heart, that is, in the affections, is the principal seat of true religion. Having contended for this, however, I am now equally earnest in maintaining, that man essentially needs a religion which, so far as it does contain any doctrines, so far as it does inculcate any particular belief concerning God, his nature, his ways, his will, and purposes, shall entirely accord with the dictates of reason, both permitting and encouraging the freest employment of all our intellectual powers. No other religion can be adapted or entitled to have the supreme government of our minds, as rational beings. No other can be a religion of peace, in the highest and best sense; for no other can ensure a settled harmony and tranquillity through all the various powers of the soul. It is in vain to speak of our obligation to prostrate the dictates of reason before the mysteries of religion. No man ever did or will, for no man *can*, rid himself of any one clear and true conviction of his understanding. We may, if we choose, resolve to act in all the momentous concerns of religion as though we were not, which by God's mercy we are, rational creatures. But to use the understanding generally, as some profess to do, in examining and ascertaining divine truth, and yet to cast off its particular convictions the moment they are felt to be in opposition to any supposed doctrine of faith, is more than man can really and sincerely do. This must be pretension, or self-delusion. It assumes the possibility of an impossible state of mind. It would imply the existence of two opposite states of consciousness at the same time,—the clear apprehension of a thing as true,

and the firm belief that it is not true,—which is impossible.

However, if this could be, which cannot be, my present argument is, that it is not such a religion which man needs for the highest satisfaction and harmonious development of *all* the noblest capacities of his soul. Reason is not the shame, it is the glory of our nature. It is not essential weakness; it is power as far as it reaches. It has not fallen upon us as a curse; it has been given to us as a blessing. In order to our highest spiritual improvement, therefore, and consequently to our highest happiness, we do not need to have our reason mortified and restrained: we need to have it cultivated, strengthened, perfected. We do not require to have a new kind of warfare stirred up in our minds, which nature has not made there, between reason and religion, to be waged till the understanding lies prostrate as a conquered foe at the feet of implicit faith. We rather need some heavenly ally and support for our reason, in the old, natural warfare, of the spirit against the flesh.

But in thus vindicating the necessity of a *reasonable* religion, let us guard against a wrong apprehension of our meaning. We cannot mean, that nothing relating to God, or his ways, must be left by religion incomprehensible to the human understanding. No man, if he be truly reasonable, will expect to meet with any religion which shall enable him thus perfectly to comprehend all divine and infinite things. He will feel, with the Apostle Paul, that it is impossible for man, by any powers of reason or any gifts of faith, to "understand all mysteries and all knowledge;" and that

if it were possible, such mere vastness of intellectual vision, would be as nothing in religion without charity —that is, love. Notwithstanding all the reproaches which have been levelled against us, my brethren, on this subject, we are not in search of a religion which may blind and flatter us with the conceit of being able to climb these inaccessible heights of knowledge. We are as content to see here "only through a glass darkly," as any of our most orthodox brethren. We are as little disposed as any men, to deny that, in many of the subjects presented to our contemplation by religious faith, there is a certain mysteriousness which subdues even while it stirs the imagination, which awes the heart, and bows the understanding down in reverential lowliness before the throne of the majesty of the Unsearchable One. We do not expect of religion, that it shall give us perfectly full and adequate conceptions, logically correct and definable ideas, upon all these inscrutable subjects. We only expect of it, that it shall leave our minds unburdened, unconfused, by any positively incredible dogmas. Many of the tenets introduced into the profession of the Christian religion, under the name of sacred mysteries, appear to us of a totally different character from those true mysteries, which reason herself discerns in the works and ways of the Almighty. They neither excite the imagination, nor impress the heart; they only bewilder the intellect and "make reason stand aghast," to see how boldly the nature and purposes of God may be sported with by the subtlety of scholastic Theologians. To mysteries, in the proper sense of the word, we can have no serious objection. It must rather be ad-

mitted, that a religion which acknowledges the existence of such true mysteries, is herein seen to be most reasonable: it accords with the felt incapacity of the human mind, fully to comprehend the infinite and the eternal. It will also afford the most suitable exercise for those feelings of solemn wonder and admiration, which seem almost like distinct and original sentiments of our nature. But in such a religion there will be nothing hostile to the conclusions of reason. We shall only be forbidden by it, either to deny or to dogmatize where knowledge is unattainable, or where reason is baffled by the greatness and unsearchableness of the subject.

It is to be observed, in this connexion, that enlightened, civilized, cultivated man, especially needs a religion which may harmonize with that constant *progress in knowledge* which is one of the most remarkable laws of our present condition. The views of men's understandings respecting God, except those which are of the very simplest kind, cannot be permanent, because of the continual increase of knowledge, and the gradual discoveries of reason. These discoveries will enable, yea, in spite of all the creeds on earth, they will oblige the men of one age to *think* of God, and of his Providence, in a manner which the men of former ages did not and could not think. This consideration strengthens my former, and indeed my main argument, in this discourse; that true religion consists in the cultivation and manifestation of certain good *affections* of our nature, which are everlastingly the same, and the objects of which are more permanent than the mere acquisitions of the intellect

can be. It is plain, however, that if the particular religion embraced contain doctrines which do not harmonize with the existing state of knowledge, in the individual or the generation, there will arise an unhallowed struggle for the mastery between reason and religion. The experience of the world has shewn what must be the miserable consequences of such an opposition between knowledge and piety. Knowledge may be checked, (which in itself is evil enough,) for a longer or shorter time, according to the spirit of the age. The wisest philosophers may be immured in dungeons, as in past times, or only assailed with foolish reproaches, as in these times, according to the spirit of the age. But, sooner or later, knowledge will prevail. The rising light of philosophy will shine more and more unto the perfect day, illuming first the loftiest and afterwards the lowliest minds. Then will the sentiments and practices of religion grow into disrepute in their turn. They who have more knowledge than piety, will complain that mankind are superstitious and fanatical. They who have more piety than knowledge, will complain that the age is an age of infidelity. This state of things has been repeatedly witnessed. There are those who seem labouring to produce it again. It is melancholy to see that the clearest deductions both of natural and mental science, the physical discoveries of a Sedgwick and the moral demonstrations of a Butler, must alike be condemned for their adjudged inconsistency with a human system which presumes to identify all its own crude traditions with God's pure word and Christ's holy gospel. It is quite another religion that is truly

needful and good for man, especially in these latter ages. It must be a religion which, whilst it inspires his heart with all pure and kind sentiments, whilst it aids him mightily in the practice of all virtue, leaves his reason free, gives unlimited scope and encouragement to the exercise of all his intellectual faculties, and leads him on to everlasting progress in truth and knowledge. We perceive that the positive doctrines of such a religion must be exceedingly few and simple; but this consideration is not likely to prevent *us* from firmly embracing the conclusion at which we have arrived.

4. I might proceed to notice as a distinct topic, that man needs a religion which may afford him bright and cheering *hopes* of the future, both for himself and others, both for time and eternity. But I am deterred from entering at large on this part of the subject, by the feeling that, even without it, I shall surely be found to have trespassed too long on the attention of my hearers. I will therefore only commend this interesting topic to your serious consideration; simply remarking, that there is no rational craving of our minds which is manifested more strongly or more uniformly. We cannot live as the brutes do, altogether in and for the present;—the past affects our memories, the future our hopes and fears. There is a necessity for hope, for some consoling and far-reaching prospects of the future, yea, even of eternity; which necessity becomes more and more urgent to man, in the degree that he becomes more enlightened and more virtuous. Any religion, therefore, which should have all the other

excellencies of which I have spoken, and yet give us gloomy and distressing views of the future dispensations of heaven, would only serve in a great measure to aggravate human misery,—the misery of the good as well as of the wicked. We do not require, indeed, to know the precise ultimate results of God's government over the whole human race. It might be as little to our benefit, as it probably is within our capacity, to have such knowledge imparted to us on earth. But we do need the surest ground of joyful anticipation for all the righteous; and we do need room for the unconfined expansion of hope, in behalf of the entire rational family of the great UNIVERSAL FATHER.

If now my indulgent audience will bear with me a few minutes longer, I would endeavour briefly to apply these views of the religion which is naturally most needful and best for man, to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we in particular have been led to interpret the gospel. I need not tell you, my brethren, that in the observations which I have been allowed the privilege of addressing to you, I have only been describing,—most faintly and most imperfectly indeed,—but still, as far as my observations have been true and just, I have only been describing Unitarian Christianity. I mean, pure, genuine, Scriptural Christianity; and I am sorry that the unhappy circumstances of the church should oblige me, for distinction's sake, to call it by a name which may seem to be, but which is not, sectarian. The religion which our understandings and hearts and consciences teach us to be so needful and so good,—this religion we believe that we find in the pages of the New Testament, gloriously

revealed in the words, works, and character of our Lord Jesus Christ. With devout thankfulness are we ready to acknowledge, that we never should have had these views and thoughts of the nature of true religion, if they had not been imparted to us by the gospel. It is therefore that we revere and love Christianity, and are resolved, with the help of Heaven, to maintain the profession of it in its purity. God forbid, my brethren, that we should ever doubt, that the various elements of this most excellent religion do exist, variously dispersed, and connected with various errors, in the belief and practices of all the great divisions of the Christian church. We dare not doubt this, if we were inclined; for we see the undeniable evidences of it, in the lives and characters of very many of our fellow-christians of every sect and name. But it is our honest conviction, that nowhere do these elements of a rational and spiritual religion exist in so much purity, nowhere are they so harmoniously combined, as in the simple, holy, heart-moving faith, which we by God's mercy have been brought to embrace. It were a long, and yet to me, I confess, an endlessly gratifying task, to shew in how many particulars Christianity, as viewed especially by Unitarians, answers to these essential requisites of a true and a good religion; how it glorifies both God and Christ, whilst it tends to cheer and bless mankind; how it weds reason to faith in holy bonds indissoluble; how it creates a fervent piety towards God, the well-spring and source of a fervent charity towards men; how it avails to bring all our best capacities, moral and intellectual, into vigorous and harmonious exercise, making the

condition of the righteous even on earth a foretaste of the happiness reserved for them in heaven;—how in all things it is a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Such, in our estimation, is the character of the views which we entertain of the gospel of Christ. And being fully persuaded in our own minds, that such a religion is the "*one thing needful*," both for the highest improvement and happiness of individual men, and for the social regeneration of communities, we therefore unite, as in this Association, to promote the knowledge and diffusion of it in the world. There never was a period, perhaps, when exertions in this sacred cause were more urgently demanded by the times and the seasons. The general mass of society, both in this and in other nations, has evidently outgrown the ancient creeds, devised in the middle and dark ages, and may now almost be said to be divided between the indifferent and the fanatical; some famishing and yearning for a more grateful spiritual aliment, others in their voracity devouring again the very dregs and refuse of ancient superstitions. It must continue so, or rather the evil must increase, until it shall please God, by means and agents which seem to him best, to restore the harmony between reason and religion. That we may possibly be able, in however humble a degree, to hasten the approach of this happy consummation, is a thought that should cause our hearts to leap with joy, and inspire us with unquenchable zeal in the Lord's service.

In conclusion, permit me to express what appears to me to be the sum and substance of our views of Christianity, as distinguished from the views of others.

Christianity is to us, as it is to all believers, a revelation from heaven, a revelation divinely, miraculously attested. But a revelation of what? A revelation of the mysterious essence and constitution of the divine nature, three persons in one God? A revelation of the Almighty's contests with the Devil, before and since the beginning of time, in the empyrean heights of heaven and in the glorious garden of paradise? A revelation of secret compacts entered into between one person of the God-head and another, for the satisfaction of the Father's justice by the outpouring of the Son's blood? No; these are to our minds the mischievous speculations of a blind, dogmatic theology. Pure, Scriptural Christianity, is a revelation to man of his own spiritual nature and spiritual wants. It shews him his own moral weakness, and the sources of that strength by which he may be strengthened unto piety and virtue. It makes him aware of his filial relations to God, of his fraternal relations to all the members of his race, and of his immortal destiny. It teaches him the causes of his wretchedness when estranged in heart and life from his heavenly Father, and the sure way and means of reconciliation. It reveals to him the final purposes of his being; clearing up the mystery of that hope and longing after immortality, that desire for some greater, purer, and more durable good, unsatisfied by all the pleasures and glories of time, to which our souls' inmost consciousness bears such unimpeachable testimony. It is here we must look for the ultimate proof of the needfulness and the worth of Christianity. For, after all which has been written and said, it must be al-

lowed that the question of the superhuman attestation given to the gospel, is quite distinguishable from that of its absolute truth and divinity. The Jews, when they beheld the mighty works of Christ, declared that these works were wrought by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of evil spirits. We say they were wrought by the power of the Most High. We say, that every one who forms an impartial estimate of the holy character and teaching of Christ, will perceive that he was not the minister of Satan, but the righteous servant of the righteous God. Nothing to my mind can be more conclusive than this reasoning. But upon what grounds, I pray you, does its conclusiveness rest? Plainly, on this principle,—that the truth of all the doctrinal and moral parts of Christianity must be ultimately determined by their agreement with the sanctions of the rational and spiritual parts of human nature. For evidence of the miraculous origin, and the historical credibility of the gospel, we may safely rely on those external proofs, so industriously collected and so clearly developed by a Lardner and a Paley. But for evidence of the absolute moral truth of this religion, we must look,—I was about to say, futher, but I should say, nearer. We must look into our own hearts. The final appeal must be made to the silent dictates of our own spirits, when our spirits are bowed down in all humility before the shrine of the God of truth, listening and eager to catch the solemn whispers of his voice, as they come forth in the still hour of devout meditation, from the most hidden recesses of our inward, spiritual nature. If we are to believe in the truth of the gospel, not idly, nor coldly,

but with the heart, with which alone man believeth unto righteousness, we must seek its evidence, not only in history, not only in Scripture, but also in our own bosoms, comparing the lessons of Scripture with the dictates and experience of honest and good hearts. We must learn to believe in it, because we feel it to be precisely that religion which is most needful for man, most suitable for the highest improvement and satisfaction of all his best capacities, most enlightening, most sanctifying, most elevating, most consoling. So great is the error of those, (an error which has lately been put forth anew, with no little pomp and speciousness of argument,) who fancy that our own nature is, from original corruption, incapable of discerning moral and spirtual truth; and that in the saving reception of the gospel, the mind of man has only to prostrate itself before sheer authority. This is so contrary to the fact, that the most quickened, active, free-working state of the human soul, is that in which it is daily becoming wise unto salvation, by the cordial reception of evangelical truth. We believe that the Christian revelation is most wisely adapted, in all which it involves, externally and internally considered, not to save man the trouble of thinking and judging for himself, in all which appertains to his spiritual interests; but to excite and guide his thoughts aright upon all such matters; to release him from the bonds of his natural ignorance, and send his mind forth, "heaven-directed," to gather truth and wisdom from all quarters; to stimulate his intellect, awaken his slumbering conscience, inspire his heart with holy desires and immortal hopes, and lay open

streams of exhaustless knowledge to satisfy his thirsting soul, from the Eternal Fountain of Light and Love.

God of truth! Father of mercies! Reveal this thy word, which is truth, to all nations, and to all dark and erring minds; and O! give it power to save men universally, from ignorance and superstition, from impiety and sin, from misery and death; and make it the harbinger of righteousness and peace to all the families of the earth. Amen.

G. SMALLFIELD, PRINTER, HACKNEY.

THE "SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST."

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN ESSEX STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 25th, 1836,

AND PUBLISHED BY THEIR DESIRE.

By JAMES ARMSTRONG, D.D., M.R.I.A.,

CO-PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF STRAND STREET, DUBLIN.

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TO

WHITLEY STOKES, Esq., M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF NATURAL HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, AND LATE SENIOR FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

TO

The Rev. GEORGE ARMSTRONG, A.B., T.C.D.,

LATE INCUMBENT OF THE PARISH OF BANGOR, IN THE DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR.

AND TO

The Rev. BLANCO WHITE,

LATE DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

Gentlemen,

Allow me the gratification of prefixing your venerated names to the following Discourse. I inscribe it to you, not as an offering worthy of your acceptance, but as a testimonial of respect, not, I trust, unsuited to faithful confessors, who have evinced such religious integrity and moral courage, in renouncing what you conscientiously believe to be a corruption of the holy religion of Christ, forfeiting your lucrative preferments for the sake of evangelical truth, and submitting to much worldly inconvenience and privation, that you might retain a conscience void of offence.

A long, intimate and cherished intercourse with my excellent

friends Dr. Stokes and Mr. Armstrong, has proved to me how beautifully this noble confession blends with the virtues that adorn the Christian doctrine. Mr. White I know only by his estimable character, his invaluable writings, the affecting story of his mental struggles, and his manly avowal of the truth.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, with respect and affection, your faithful friend,

JAMES ARMSTRONG.

A SERMON.

MATTHEW xii. 32:

WHOSOEVER SPEAKETH AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT, IT SHALL NOT BE FORGIVEN HIM, NEITHER IN THIS WORLD NOR IN THE WORLD TO COME.

THE alarming denunciation contained in these words must arrest the attention of every reflecting mind. It is set forth in similar language in the gospels of the Evangelists Mark and Luke; and seems to be alluded to by the Evangelist John in his first General Epistle, as relating to what he there denominates *"the sin unto death."*

A crime so deadly—marked by our blessed Lord with such severe displeasure—and eliciting such awful threatenings from lips that seldom uttered any language but that of mercy, forgiveness, and peace, —demands the strictest investigation into its nature, that it may be most vigilantly guarded against and carefully avoided, in every shape, appearance and degree.

The most obvious method by which we may as-

certain the precise nature of this sin is, to consider the character of the persons to whom it was imputed by our Saviour, and the peculiar circumstances in their conduct which drew from him such severe and signal reprehension.

The occasion on which these words were uttered, as recorded by the Evangelist Matthew, was as follows:—while Christ was engaged in the instruction of the people, dispensing to them the words of life and exercising his miraculous powers for the cure of their various diseases, a wretched maniac was brought before him deprived of sight, destitute of the power of speech, and supposed to be possessed with a devil, according to the popular notions of the Jews, who ascribed to demoniacal influence all such privations of the mental faculties or bodily senses. Our Lord, taking compassion on this miserable being, instantly healed him, "insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw." The multitude who stood by, astonished at this manifest exertion of supernatural power, regarded Jesus with wonder and veneration; and seemed disposed to acknowledge him as their promised and long-expected Messiah: "And all the people were amazed and said, 'Is not this the son of David?'"

The sentiments thus expressed by the people gave much offence and alarm to a certain party of the rulers of Judea, who were obstinately determined to oppose the recognition of Jesus as the Christ of God. This faction, unable to resist the evidence to his divine commission presented by such an un-

questionable exercise of supernatural powers, affected to attribute these powers to the Author of Evil, and endeavoured to persuade the people that Jesus was an agent of Satan; representing his miraculous works, which they did not attempt to deny, as having been performed under the influence of the Prince of the Devils. In reply to this atrocious calumny, our Saviour condescended to reason with his perverse and slanderous opponents, and disproved their assertions by a chain of irresistible argument; demonstrating the absurdity of imagining that an agent of the prince of the devils would perform works manifestly tending to overthrow the kingdom of Satan; and clearly proving that the powers which he exercised could emanate only from that divine authority with which he was invested by his Heavenly Father. He concludes his argument with the awakening admonition contained in the text; assuring his calumniators, that he that shall "blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal condemnation."

That our Lord intended to charge the Pharisees and Scribes with this crime, may be collected from the whole passage. His intention is, indeed, directly proved in the corresponding passage in the Evangelist Mark, which states that the words were addressed to them, "because they said he had an unclean spirit."

The great question, then, to be resolved, is, what was the nature of the unpardonable offence of which the Pharisees and Scribes were guilty?—It must

have been something more than rejecting the Messiah, impugning his doctrines, and thwarting the progress of his religion; for Christ himself declares in the very same passage, that "whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him";—nay more, that "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven."

Here our Saviour marks a distinction that well deserves our most serious attention. If any of the Pharisees and Scribes did actually regard him as a false prophet who worked signs and wonders by means of demoniacal agency, for the purpose of misleading the people, then their speaking against him proceeded from an honest indignation against what they conceived to be an imposture. Their opposition to him, flowing, in this case, from a sincere though erroneous principle, did not involve any moral turpitude or criminal intention. Though their stupidity must appear very gross, it did not constitute an unpardonable offence; and our Lord declares that whatever might be said against him from such sincere though mistaken views, would be forgiven. To carry this point still farther,—may we not reasonably conclude that if any of them were conscientiously impressed with the conviction that Jesus was not the true Messiah, it was their duty to discourage his progress until they had ascertained, and were satisfied with respect to, the validity of his pretensions? Let us bear in mind that the Redeemer who came to reveal the truth, always in-

vited and approved of the strictest scrutiny into his claims; for truth ever becomes more clear the more it is investigated. He not only invited but enjoined his hearers to judge for themselves; to examine his works and his doctrines; and to compare the circumstances of his birth, lineage, life and character, with the predictions of Moses and the prophets, in order that they might be convinced of his indisputable claim to the sacred title of the Messiah, and become fully satisfied of the reality of his divine commission. Notwithstanding this, many of the Jews remained unconvinced and really ignorant of his true character and office. Wheresoever this ignorance proceeded from wilful neglect of the means of information, or from obstinate prejudice against Jesus Christ, it was highly reprehensible; because, in either case, they closed their eyes against the truth; "seeing they saw not, hearing they heard not, neither would they understand." But if their error was involuntary, it was a subject of pity rather than of condemnation, and could not incur the charge of that dreadful guilt for which there is no forgiveness. On the contrary, our Saviour makes a merciful allowance in every case of involuntary error, and in every case of ignorance when accompanied with sincerity. In this spirit he supplicated his Heavenly Father to forgive the infuriated mob which surrounded his cross, because "they knew not what they did."

But there was another class of the Pharisees and Rulers whose motives in rejecting Christ were of a

very different description. These were the persons who vilified his miracles though they were *convinced* that he *did* act under the appointment of the Deity, and who resisted his teaching though they *believed* it to be dictated by the spirit of God.—From many circumstances recorded in the New Testament, it evidently appears that a powerful faction of the priests and Pharisees had conspired together to check the advancing light of religious truth, to oppose the progress of Christianity at every hazard, and to crush its blessed Founder under the heavy weight of secular authority. There are various manifestations of the character of this faction recorded in the Scriptures, which clearly prove that their rejection of our Saviour was contrary to the conviction of their own minds. Let us recollect the prevarication and duplicity of their answers to Christ relative to John the Baptist. Let us recollect their subornation of false witnesses against our Lord, on his trial before the High Priest; their iniquitous opposition to Peter and John, whose miracle, performed in the name of Christ, they were compelled to acknowledge and admit; and their infamous conspiracy with a Jewish banditti to murder the Apostle Paul. In particular, let us recollect their atrocious attempt to stifle the evidence to the most important fact in the Christian dispensation; —a fact which must have removed every shadow of a doubt from their minds relative to the divine character and commission of Jesus Christ;—a fact to which he himself frequently appealed as the incon-

trovertible sign which would be given to that adulterous and sinful generation. I allude to his resurrection. How did this faction of priests and Pharisees receive this undeniable and stupendous interposition of the power of the Almighty? They bribed the Roman soldiers who had been placed as a guard at the tomb, to say that the disciples of Christ conveyed away the body by night while the centinels slept. They thus proved themselves to be men capable of the most nefarious violations of moral rectitude;—capable of the most determined opposition to the progress of a religion which they knew to be true;—and, to fill up the measure of their iniquity, capable of resisting heaven itself by attempting to falsify or conceal the clearest manifestations of supernatural power.

It is clear, then, that our Saviour had in view two classes of his opponents, betwixt whom he made a very decided distinction;—those who from ignorance of his real character treated him with neglect or persecution; and those who obstructed his religion in despite of the conviction of their own minds. The former he declares would be forgiven; but the latter are unpardonable.

From hence two most important positions seem to be undeniably collected. First, that involuntary error in matters of religion is not arraigned by the laws of Christianity, and will not be charged against any man as guilt at the tribunal of our final Judge. Secondly, that insincerity in religion is a crime the most atrocious in its own nature, the most

offensive in the sight of God, and the most severely reprehended and denounced by the Author of our salvation.—Let us apply these positions to the conduct of those Pharisees and priests who calumniated our Saviour, and we shall clearly discover wherein consisted the heinousness of their guilt. They were persuaded in their own hearts that Jesus spoke the truth as dictated by the spirit of God, and that he acted under divine appointment and authority; yet, notwithstanding this conviction, they rejected him, slandered him, obstructed the spread of his religion, and finally persecuted him unto death.

The motives which induced this faction to resist so obstinately the religion of Christ, aggravated the atrocity of their guilt, and fully justified him in imputing to them that tremendous crime for which there is no forgiveness. These motives may be readily traced, and can be easily understood from a slight review of the character and condition of the Pharisees at the time of our Saviour's earthly ministration.

For a considerable time previous to the advent of the Messiah this sect had obtained a predominant influence in the civil and ecclesiastical government of the Jewish people. This influence they employed, not to promote a strict adherence to the purity of that system of religion and policy which had been established under a divine sanction by their inspired legislator; but to a code of arbitrary regulations devised by themselves—a system of articles and

canons—a sort of confession of faith—which they maintained under the specious title of "*the traditions of the Elders,*" and which they inculcated on the people as of paramount, nay of superior authority, to that of the law and the prophets.

Their daring presumption in thus substituting the inventions of men in place of the revealed will of God, and introducing into the national church doctrines and practices opposed to the written word, drew forth from our Lord on several occasions a severe and indignant rebuke. "Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your traditions? Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your traditions." And he informs them in express terms that they worshiped God in vain so long as "they taught for doctrines the commandments of men." An awful sentence! which should excite in all the worshipers of God the most anxious and inquisitive spirit of investigation into the nature of the doctrines they profess, whether they be indeed according to divine revelation, or whether they be only fashioned by the devices of superstition, the contrivances of priestcraft, and the enactments of human authority.

The ecclesiastical government of the Jews was deeply infected with the corruptions of the Pharisees. The succession to the important offices of their hierarchy was diverted from the channel in which it had been directed to flow according to the Mosaical regulations. Persons disqualified by their lineage, and often more disqualified by their moral

and religious defects, were elevated to the highest dignities of the priesthood by the favour of a prince or the influence of a political party. Hence, that office which, above all others, ought to be preserved the most pure and free from all worldly contamination, frequently became the prize of greedy and ambitious men, engaged in constant intrigues for promotion, and ready to make any sinful compliance to effectuate their sordid designs.

The system thus gradually introduced into the national church, was sustained by imposture and hypocrisy, and corrupted to the very core. It was exercised, too, with great rapacity and oppression. Our Saviour directly charges the Scribes and Pharisees with "binding heavy burdens and laying them on men's shoulders, while they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers." All their powers were exerted to maintain their own influence. All their zeal was directed to support their own domination. A *Corban* (or gift to their treasury) would induce them to relax the strictest bonds of the divine law. They would dispense with the most important moral obligations—even those of grateful duty and affection to a parent—provided the offerings to the temple were duly paid. Against all religious inquiry they most consistently closed the doors, conscious that their system could not stand the test. "They shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: they would neither go in themselves, nor suffer those that were entering to go in." But they were indefatigably zealous in gaining con-

verts to their own faction. "They compassed sea and land to make one proselyte," to strengthen their interest by the addition of one thorough-going partizan; making him, to use the forcible language of our Lord, "two-fold more the child of hell than themselves."

This powerful faction of the Jews seems to have been roused into unusual activity at the time when our Saviour commenced his public ministration. A new impulse had just been given to the moral feelings of the nation by the energetic and awakening admonitions of John the Baptist. The apprehensions of the Priests and Pharisees were alarmed by the intelligence that multitudes were crowding to the wilderness, attracted by the pure and simple doctrines of this holy prophet, desiring to be baptized of him and confessing their sins. Their alarm at these indications of reform must have been increased by the stern rebuke of the Baptist, publicly addressed to themselves, when he denounced the downfal of their corruptions; upbraided them "as a generation of vipers"; admonished them "to bring forth fruits meet for repentance"; warned them that "the axe was now laid to the root of the trees; and that every tree that brought not forth good fruit would be hewn down and cast into the fire"; and announced the approach of "one mightier than himself, whose fan was in his hand, who would thoroughly purge his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into his garner, but burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Terrified at the prospect of advancing reform which they were conscious must lead to the decline of their influence and authority, and desirous to counteract the progress of public opinion excited by the preaching of John, the Pharisees seem to have assumed at this crisis an increased appearance of sanctity and zeal, and to have enveloped themselves still more closely in the folds of their multiplied hypocrisy. What a powerfully sketched picture of them does our Saviour delineate, when he informs us that "they loved to pray standing in the synagogues and in the streets, that they might be seen of men"! "They did alms, sounding a trumpet before them in the synagogues and in the streets, that they might be seen of men." "They made broad their phylacteries" (on which were written quotations from the law), "and enlarged the borders of their garments" (on which were fastened sentences of Scripture), that they might display their zeal for the word of God. All their almsgivings were ostentatious. All their religion was hypocritical. All their zeal was assumed with the selfish view of retaining and increasing their ill-gotten opulence and power. While "they omitted justice and mercy and faith—those weightier matters of the law," they were rigorous in exacting "tithes of all manner of herbs." While they were "devouring widows' houses," they were at the same time, "for a pretence, making long prayers."—Well might the Redeemer compare them to "the cup and the platter, clean on the outside, but, within, full of extortion

and excess." With good reason did he liken them to "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Even so they also outwardly appeared righteous unto men, but within were full of hypocrisy, falsehood and iniquity.

To a faction so corrupted in every motive, banded together by such base and dishonest ties, and exercising such an unrighteous domination in all affairs both civil and religious, nothing could be more terrific or alarming than the pure religion of the Son of God. In that mental emancipation which it produces—in that religious freedom which it confers—in that full revelation of the Divine will which it conveys—in that sincerity of heart and that uprightness of conduct which it declares to be indispensable for obtaining the favour of the Deity,—they must have clearly foreseen the overthrow of their usurped domination, the breaking up of their corrupt system, the rapid decline of all that influence which they possessed over the minds of an ignorant and prejudiced people, and, what was yet more galling, the sweeping away of all those emoluments which flowed in by means of their hypocrisy, bigotry, priestcraft and imposture. They must have foreseen that the threshing-floor of the Lord would indeed be thoroughly purged of the chaff of all human additions and inventions. Dismayed by this prospect, they rejected, slandered, and persecuted the Son of God. They closed their eyes against the reception of truth. They acted in opposition to the

settled conviction of their own minds and the light of their own conscience. They used their utmost exertions, and employed every base art of malignity, calumny, falsehood and misrepresentation, to obstruct a religion which they knew to be true, and to uphold a system which they were conscious was in many points greatly corrupted, in others absolutely false and contradictory to the plainest teachings of the law and the prophets.

From this detail of the motives and conduct of the Scribes, the Priests, and the Pharisees, as recorded in the New Testament,—which induced them to reject the Messiah and to misrepresent his miracles,—we may clearly understand the precise nature of that heinous offence with which they were charged by our Saviour, and which he denominates "*blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.*" Their guilt manifestly consisted in this,—THE SACRIFICE OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTION IN ORDER TO SERVE A WORLDLY INTEREST.

Following the same train of argument, we are irresistibly led to a general conclusion of the most awakening nature; a conclusion most profoundly interesting and momentous to every person who cherishes religious feelings in any degree: viz. that WHOSOEVER ABANDONS OR OPPOSES WHAT HE CONSCIENTIOUSLY BELIEVES TO BE RELIGIOUS TRUTH, IS GUILTY OF THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT, no matter what may be the inducement—whether the fear of man, or the desire of popular favour, or the hope of worldly power and emolument, or at-

tachment to domestic ties, or any earthly motive whatsoever.

In drawing this general conclusion, I am quite aware that I have carried the argument much farther than most biblical critics have done. The sin against the Holy Spirit is considered by many as restricted in its application to those only who attributed our Saviour's miraculous cures to demoniacal agency. Consequently, it is described by such commentators as a species of guilt into which no person can fall who acknowledges the divine commission of the Redeemer.

If indeed we confined our attention to the passages in the Evangelists Matthew and Mark, in which are detailed the circumstances which drew this heavy charge from the lips of Christ, we might have some foundation for concurring in this opinion. But, in the Evangelist Luke, a solemn warning against this crime forms a prominent portion of a most pathetic address from Christ to *his own disciples,* delivered in the midst of a vast multitude of people. He speaks of it there—not as limited to those who obstinately rejected himself and calumniated his miracles,—but as a crime into which those who received and acknowledged him—even his own followers and friends—might be seduced or betrayed, without due vigilance and circumspection. In this address, he forewarns his disciples that the religious integrity of Christians themselves would frequently be tried by the temptations of the world, and particularly by that "fear of man which bringeth

a snare":—that, in such circumstances, they must "beware of hypocrisy," confiding in that protection of the Deity which extends to the humblest objects of his creation, and maintaining their integrity at every hazard:—that, with respect to Christ himself, they must "confess him before men," and declare what in their souls they believe to be true concerning him, if they expect him to acknowledge them in his heavenly kingdom;—that, whatever might be their sincere opinion concerning him, involuntary error would be forgiven;—but that they were never on any occasion to belie the convictions of their own minds; for that, in so doing, they would blaspheme against the Holy Ghost. The passage I allude to is in the twelfth chapter of Luke's Gospel. "He began to say unto his disciples first of all, 'Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. .....I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings; and not one of them is forgotten before God?....Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.—Also, I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.—And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be

forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven."

In this very awful and awakening passage of Scripture there is presented to us in the plainest terms an admonition of our Lord, not addressed to the enemies who maligned and opposed him, but *emphatically* to his own professed followers and disciples;—not restricted in its application to any peculiar mode of religious prevarication, but extended to every species of hypocrisy and false dealing in spiritual concerns. From this it is unquestionably demonstrated that, whatever be the nature of the crime of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, it is a species of guilt which may be incurred not only by the open foes of Christianity, but by its professing advocates and supporters. And, the nature of the crime having been ascertained by investigating the character, motives and conduct of the Pharisees, Scribes and Priests, who were manifestly guilty thereof,—it appears most clearly to be resolved into this distinct and unembarrassed definition—THE SACRIFICE OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTION ON ACCOUNT OF ANY WORLDLY HOPE OR FEAR;—OR, THE ABANDONMENT AND DISAVOWAL OF WHAT WE ARE PERSUADED IS RELIGIOUS TRUTH, FOR ANY EARTHLY MOTIVE WHATSOEVER.

Manifold are the ways in which men may be seduced to swerve from their Christian fidelity, to sacrifice their conscientious convictions on the altar of temporal interest, and so to incur the guilt and the penalty of that tremendous crime which the

Saviour declares "shall not be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come." As to the extent of this alarming intimation, it is not necessary to enter into any discussion. Whether the punishment of this crime be corrective, leading to future restoration, as some Christians maintain with respect to the punishment of all sin in a future state; or whether it will continue as an everlasting evidence of God's detestation of religious hypocrisy; are questions unconnected with the present subject. It is sufficient for us to know that the denunciation was uttered by the Redeemer himself, as a solemn warning, to deter all his followers, in every age and country, from the commission of a crime which vitiates and nullifies every religious duty, and renders the worship of God utterly profitless to the spiritual improvement and eternal salvation of the human soul.

There is one exemplification of this crime which I believe is not very rare, and to which I would especially advert, as being more particularly connected with the objects of your Association and with the occasion of our assembling together at the present time.

If any person have obtained a settled persuasion, from a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, that the blessed Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, hath established Christianity on this all-important doctrine that "THERE IS BUT ONE GOD," and that "THERE IS NONE OTHER BUT HE";—if, notwithstanding the conviction of his mind, such a

person deliberately and wilfully maintain or countenance doctrines which he knows to be subversive of this fundamental truth, and which he is well assured have been invented by the daring presumption of uninspired men,—how does such prevarication differ from the crime of the Pharisees when they wilfully calumniated the evidence to the truth of the gospel and taught "for doctrines the commandments of men"? It is certainly the same in kind; because, in both cases, it proceeds from some sordid motive or interest incompatible with the light and liberty of the Gospel of Jesus; because, in both cases, it is a deliberate violation or desertion of what is believed to be the truth; because, in both cases, it sullies and vitiates that sincerity of soul which alone can render our homage acceptable to that God who is a Spirit, and who desireth that men should "worship him in spirit and in truth."

In its effects, too, it is the very same as the crime of the Pharisees, not only because it destroys all the efficacy of religion by poisoning its fountain in the heart of the individual himself, but because, in all his social relations, it leads him to obstruct the progress of the pure and uncorrupted Gospel. Who can tell how far the example and influence of a single individual who has thus prevaricated in the awful concerns that lie between God and his own soul, may operate in retaining or spreading error and corruption, and in preventing the extension or restoration of the undefiled religion of Christ? No man can tell how far the consequences may reach,

of such a dereliction of principle;—but, as far as these consequences can be traced to his insincerity, is he not responsible for their effects?

It may indeed be a severe trial of a man's fortitude, should a conscientious attachment to religious truth compel him to withdraw from the church in which he has been accustomed to worship, and which may have been endeared to him by many fond and early associations. The trial may be the more severe, if, by his avowal of the truth, he be obliged to forego worldly advantages, perhaps to be exposed to calumny, odium, misrepresentation, and the alienation of former friends—and to have "all manner of evil said falsely against him for Christ's sake and the Gospel's." But, in such a case, the language of our Saviour is strict, explicit and imperative. It enjoins us "to forsake all and follow him." It commands us to do our duty and leave the consequences to God.—The consequences may indeed be painful; but we should look upon these as the appointed trials of our fidelity. Our resolute endurance of them is the proof of our loyalty to the King of kings. Our determined adherence to the truth, in defiance of all such consequences, is the evidence of our allegiance to the Captain of our Salvation.

And how much better is it to endure any temporal calamity, however afflictive, than to bear about the oppressive burden of a conscience weighed down with a secret sense of dissimulation before the Great

Searcher of hearts! What opiate can earthly honours or emoluments administer to the breast that writhes under the torturing scourge of remorse for treacherous dealing in the blessed cause of the truth and the liberty of the Redeemer's gospel? What anodyne or mitigation can the praise of men, or popular applause, or the favour of princes, or ecclesiastical rank, or any earthly dignity or wealth whatever, supply, to the heart that is gnawed by that never-dying worm, the sin against the spirit of truth—the crime that hath no forgiveness!—Alas! "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul"!

Painful and degrading as this feeling must be in the bosom of any man, it must be tremendously aggravated when it is found in the breast of him whose sacred duty it is to teach and boldly to declare the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Imagination cannot conceive a state of degradation more humiliating, or a species of mental agony more acute than that of the minister of religion who is conscious of handling the word of God deceitfully; who is induced by the love of popularity, or the fear of man, or the desire of wealth and rank, or attachment to political party, to profess publicly what his heart disavows, and to teach as religious truth what he knows to be contrary to the instructions of his Divine Master; who supports corruptions against which his secret soul revolts; who misleads his flock in the solemn mockery of repeating creeds

which he does not believe, and of subscribing to confessions of faith and ecclesiastical articles which he knows to be unscriptural, erroneous and anti-christian;—and who crowns these monstrous enormities by solemnly declaring that he is moved to commit them by the special influence of the Holy Ghost! If this be not blasphemy against the spirit of God, where is it to be found?—O miserable state! O pitiable condition! "O my soul, come not thou into their secret!—Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!"

That there have been minds in this most unhappy condition and on this very subject cannot be doubted, for we have their own testimony faithfully recorded by a cloud of witnesses. Out of these, permit me to remind you of two or three distinguished instances in our own lands, and almost in our own times.—Let me mention ROBERTSON, that profound scholar and upright man;—a clergyman possessed of high ecclesiastical dignities and emoluments, with the reasonable expectations of yet higher promotion: who resigned all, and retired to absolute poverty, rather than continue to sustain the pangs of a wounded conscience. His affecting letter, addressed to his diocesan, on resigning his benefices, may give us some idea of the painful struggles of his mind before he adopted the magnanimous determination, worthy of a disciple of Christ, of bearing his testimony to the truth at every hazard—and of confessing the Lord Jesus before men.—Let me

mention the venerable LINDSEY: and who can mention his name in this place*, without deep emotion!—who made a yet greater sacrifice; renouncing the most brilliant prospects of rising by his own acknowledged merit and the influence of noble connexions, to the highest rank in that church from which his conscience compelled him to withdraw. Let us read the pathetic address of this excellent man to his parishioners, on resigning his benefice, and we shall have the clearest evidence of the effects of such a cruel situation on minds endowed with religious feeling and moral sensibility. I might dwell too on the noble conduct of his worthy successor DISNEY, and of GILBERT WAKEFIELD, a name dear alike to literature and to freedom; who "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming reproach for Christ greater riches than all the treasures" of the church from which they retired, and whose doctrines they found to be unsound and unscriptural.—Let me mention yet another; the learned and amiable JEBB: who confessed the Lord Jesus in a similar way—forsaking all to follow Christ, and spurning every worldly temptation that opposed his open profession of the truth as revealed by his Divine Master. His memorable reply to a dear friend, who urged him to pause before he resigned his fellowship in the Uni-

* Essex Street Chapel: the house in which Mr. Lindsey was Minister for many years.

versity of Cambridge, and his livings in the Established Church, ought to be treasured in the hearts of all who can estimate Christian integrity and truth: "I will not," said he, "I cannot, I dare not, consent any longer to act, every seventh day, a lie before the God of truth."

These instances might be paralleled by many cases in our day, of splendid sacrifices on the altar of religious sincerity. With what pleasure might I dilate on some of these—but I forbear—fearful lest private friendship might transport me beyond the bounds of just esteem and admiration!

Now, let me ask, what is it that could have induced such men to forego great worldly advantages, and to expose themselves to much inconvenience and severe privations, in order to profess a faith opposed by established modes, and discountenanced by the influence, the prejudices and the fashion of the times?—What but the deep and irresistible conviction of the truth of this grand and fundamental principle of revealed religion, that "to us there is but ONE GOD, the FATHER; and ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST"?—What but the irrepressible sense of their indispensable obligation to declare this all-important principle before men, and to publish to the world this truly evangelical confession of their faith?—What but the overpowering apprehension of offending their God, betraying their Redeemer, blaspheming against the spirit of truth, and endangering, nay forfeiting, this eternal salvation, if they continued to profess and to teach what they

knew to be contrary to this primary principle of the blessed Gospel of Christ?—What, but such conscientious motives, could induce men to surrender cheerfully their worldly possessions, to forego their own ease and comfort, to come down from their station in human society, and to expose themselves to obloquy and misrepresentation in preaching unpopular truths?—They were well aware that Unitarian Christianity has no worldly allurements of any kind, to entice men to tamper with their own conscience. She has no splendid dignities, no rich endowments, no crowds of fashion, no popular applause. She has not even the excitement of enthusiasm,—that charm so alluring to weak minds; for she rejects every species of fanaticism; she pretends not to any extraordinary spiritual illumination; she turns with pity or disgust from the irrational fervours of a wild and ill-directed imagination; and she considers *that* man's faith to be grossly defective who cannot give a *reason* for the hope that is in him. Faithful in her duty to Christ, she takes Him alone as her Master, her King, and her Head. Steadfast in her allegiance to God, she takes His Word alone as her guide, exercising in the search of that word the unbiassed love of truth, the uncontrouled exercise of the understanding and the practice of universal charity.

Universal charity! Yes! This is a prominent and distinguishing feature of the pure and uncontaminated gospel. It is by this feature that the true disciples of Christ are to be known. How is

it, then, that hatred and strife and enmity prevail so widely among Christian churches?—Because they have departed from the principles of the gospel. "By this," said our Saviour, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Christian churches reverse this rule.—By this, say they, shall all men know your zeal for Christ, if ye hate those of his flock that are not of your own fold; if ye cherish rancour against them, and revile them, and speak falsely against them; if ye plunder them, and persecute them in this world, and denounce them to eternal woe in the world to come.—Blessed be God! Unitarian Christianity is free from this foul stain.—Her purity of doctrine maintains her charity of practice.—She desires not only to promote the glory of God in the highest, but to extend peace over the whole earth, and good-will to every human being. We are taught by Unitarian Christianity to respect the conscientious convictions of all our fellow-christians, how much soever they may differ from us in opinion or in modes of worship,—whether they be Catholic or Calvinist, Episcopalian or Independent. We are taught to believe that every sincere disciple of every church and sect, who embraces that mode which appears to his best judgment to be the truth, has adopted the saving faith which will guide him to heaven. We, therefore, look upon all honest and pious men, of every church, as our Christian brethren, possessed of the same privileges with ourselves, and equally with us heirs of that everlasting salva-

tion which is through Christ our Lord. We claim from them in return the liberality which we so cheerfully exercise,—that they will respect in us what we respect in them,—the peaceable and undisturbed liberty of conscience which is our civil privilege under our happy Constitution, and our religious right by the charter of our salvation.

Friends, brethren, and fellow-christians!—The subject to which I have endeavoured to call your attention appears to my mind one of the most awful, awakening and alarming, in the entire circle of religious obligations. A clear conscience in this matter is inseparably connected with our eternal welfare. In the management of our spiritual concerns let us bear in mind, that our Saviour has plainly informed us, that any sacrifice of conscientious conviction, for the sake of any worldly hope or fear, is that "sin against the Holy Ghost" for which there is no forgiveness. Most thankful ought we to be, that, from the peculiar circumstances of our religious profession, we are less exposed than others to fall into this direful offence.—And, yet, it behoves us to be cautious, vigilant and prayerful, lest we fall into temptation. As our pure and simple faith lays the axe to the root of all religious corruptions,—as it must and ultimately will winnow out the chaff of human inventions from the sound wheat of the gospel, so its progress is regarded with dread and apprehension by all those that are interested in the support of these corruptions and inventions. Hence we have the true

reason on account of which, like the primitive church, we are "*a sect every where spoken against,*" misrepresented and reviled. Hence we have the true cause, on account of which we are continually assailed in the pulpit, on the platform, in the press, by that unrelenting and intolerant bigotry which is the disgrace of the present age, and which is the sure token of great religious degeneracy. Hence, too, the very laws are strained against us, to deprive us of our common funds and our houses of prayer. Arrayed against us are those formidable enemies, the interest, the enthusiasm and the fashion of the world. The primitive church had not greater difficulties to struggle with, at the first promulgation of evangelical truth, from the opposition of the selfish and worldly-minded Pharisees, than we, at its revival, have sometimes to contend with, from similar causes. As the Almighty tried the faithfulness of his servants then, so does it please him to try our faithfulness now.

Amidst so many discouragements, that we may be enabled to adhere to our profession steadfastly and unswervingly, we have need of a profound devotedness of principle, of a firm determination of mind, of a resolute faithfulness to the truth as it is in Jesus. We have need of constant watchfulness, of fervent prayer, of divine grace, of heavenly support, to defend us against the snares and temptations with which we are beset, and the various persecutions to which we are exposed. But let us not be faint-hearted or dismayed. We have a good

cause and an all-powerful Protector. Let us follow the example of our Saviour, of his immediate disciples, and of the primitive church, in confessing and publishing the truth of the gospel, regardless of the enmity of those that oppose themselves thereto. Let us keep the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. Never let us stifle the convictions of our own conscience. Never let us stoop to accommodate the sacred and eternal principles of evangelical truth and of Christian liberty, to the interests, the fears or the fashions of this brief and transitory scene. Let us, on all occasions, at all times, and in all places, bear our testimony to the uncontaminated religion of our Divine Lord; openly, as not being ashamed,—confidently, as knowing in whom we trust,—peaceably and charitably, as the servants of a meek and merciful Redeemer,—and faithfully, as in the presence of Him who searcheth the heart and requireth truth in the inmost parts.

To His name be glory, through Christ our Lord. —Amen.

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UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 21st, 1837,

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ROBERT WALLACE.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE day appointed for the proclamation of her Majesty's Accession to the Throne, happened to be the one fixed for the delivery of the following Sermon; and the procession was on its way to the city at the moment that the congregation was in the act of assembling. The excitement inseparable from such an occasion, with its usual accessories, (the ringing of bells and the firing of cannon,) was as trying to the preacher as it must have been distracting to the attention of his audience. But the coincidence, though unfavourable to the object of the meeting, may be regarded as of auspicious omen. Viewing it in this light, the author ventures to express a hope, that the reign of her Majesty may be distinguished by the triumph of religious principle, and Christian sincerity, over all the corrupting influences of the world; that, in the words of her Majesty's gracious declaration to the members of the Privy Council, "the full enjoyment of religious liberty" may be secured to all classes of her Majesty's subjects; that every temptation to duplicity, and every motive for apostacy, may be removed; and that the religion of Jesus, in its native simplicity and power, may go on *conquering and to conquer*, till all *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.*

A SERMON.

My Christian Friends,

The circumstances under which I appear before you this morning, as the organ of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, give me a strong claim upon your candour and indulgence. The decease of his late Majesty, King William the Fourth, and the bright prospect opened to us by the accession of our youthful Queen, Victoria, are events of deep and absorbing interest, which render it difficult for us to confine our attention to such subjects as usually occupy our minds on the return of this Anniversary. Yet, alive as we must all feel to what is taking place around us, I trust we shall not lose sight of the important object for which we are this day assembled; and in reference to the furtherance of which, I would now call your attention to

2 Pet. ii. 1:

But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

In discoursing from these words, I shall not take upon myself the direct advocacy of those principles which bind us together as a community of Christians, or occupy your time with a defence of those doctrines by which we are distinguished from the rest of the Christian world. These subjects have been so often, and so

well treated by those who have gone before me, that I should almost despair of being able to advance any thing regarding them with which you are not already familiar. I shall, therefore, confine myself simply to an elucidation of the passage of scripture just read, and shall endeavour to shew that, on no principle of fair and legitimate interpretation, can it be applied to us, as a body of professed Christian believers, but that it was penned solely with a reference to the conduct of those who, under the name of Gnostics,* perverted the Gospel in the primitive ages of Christianity.

Numerous traces of the existence of Gnosticism in the times of the Apostles occur in the writings of the New Testament; and if authentic documents, descriptive of the notions promulgated by the leading false teachers of that period, had descended to our times, it is probable that much light would have been thrown upon scriptural expressions, which are now involved in deep and almost impenetrable obscurity. But it was the policy of Christians in later ages (a policy which, though on some accounts it is to be lamented, we can well excuse, when we consider the manner in which Gnosticism insinuated itself into every existing form of religion, whether Jewish, Heathen, or Christian) to suppress, and, as far as lay in their power, to destroy the writings of these indefatigable and successful perverters of the Gospel of Christ; so that we have now only a few scattered fragments left, to guide us in our researches on this curious and interesting question.†

In the books of the New Testament we occasionally find intimations of the defection of some of the early Christian teachers; but these intimations are, for the most part, brief and incidental.‡ It is quite clear, however, that doctrines of the most pernicious tendency

* See Note A.

† See Note B.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; 2 Tim. i. 15.

were engrafted upon Christianity soon after its first plantation;* and we shall find, on a comparison of the first Epistle of Peter with the Epistle of Jude, that the former was written before, and the latter after, the Christian church had become infested with these doctrines.

Not only did our Lord foresee what would happen to his church in this respect, but the Apostles evidently anticipated a time when it would require much care to detect, as well as skill to unravel, the sophistry of the false teachers. On this subject the intimations given by Paul are both clear and express. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians he says, *there* MUST *be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest*;† and when he sent for the elders of the Church of Ephesus to Miletus, and delivered to them that deeply affecting address, of which a brief outline is preserved in the Book of Acts, he said, *This I* KNOW, *that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock: also* OF YOUR OWN SELVES *shall men arise, speaking perverse things, and draw away disciples after them.*‡ Nor was Peter less alive than Paul to the danger which was to be apprehended from the innovations of those false teachers, who were so soon to penetrate into the very heart of the church, and corrupt the purity of the Christian faith, when he wrote these words: *There were false prophets* AMONG THE PEOPLE, *even as there shall be false teachers* AMONG YOU, *who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

This passage of scripture, my Christian friends, will afford ample scope for inquiry and reflection: but before I proceed to a detailed examination of its several clauses,

* 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18; Rev. ii. 15.

† 1 Cor. xi. 19.

‡ Acts xx. 29, 30.

permit me to call your attention to a few remarks upon the *genuineness, date,* and *prophetic character* of the book in which it occurs.

(1.) It has been doubted by some critics of eminence, whether the Epistle in which this passage is contained was written by the illustrious Apostle, whose name it bears; and even the discreet Lardner places it among the number of those books which, in his judgment, "should be allowed to be publicly read in Christian assemblies for the edification of the people, but not be alleged as affording, alone, sufficient proof of any doctrine."* But this distinction between the doctrinal authority and practical tendency of certain books in our present canon, is, to say the least of it, one of very doubtful expediency. The Epistle under consideration purports to be written by SIMON PETER, *a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ;* and is inscribed, as such, *to those who have obtained like precious faith with himself.*† If, therefore, it was not composed by Peter, it must have been forged by some artful impostor, who assumed his character, and arrogated to himself the authority which attaches to his venerable name. But surely no book, of which a reasonable suspicion exists, that it was the production of one who feigned himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, can be regarded as a fit vehicle for Christian edification! Nor can it with truth be alleged of the Epistle in question, that it affords any just ground for such suspicion. The Christians of the fourth century, when the number of spurious writings, under the names of Apostles, had multiplied to a prodigious and alarming extent, evinced great wisdom and foresight in the efforts which they made to fix the canon. Materials for this purpose were then at hand, which had long been accumulating, and of which the most impartial and

* History of the Apostles and Evangelists, Chap. ii. § 4.
† 2 Pet. i. 1.

judicious use appears to have been made; and though no previous decision of individuals, however eminent, or of councils, however grave and venerable, ought to interpose a bar to further inquiries on this subject, it may with confidence be asserted, that no book which has found a place in the Christian canon has been admitted into it on slight grounds. In this discourse, therefore, I shall not presume to question, for an instant, the genuineness either of this Epistle, or of the one which has come down to us under the name of Jude, and to which similar suspicions of forgery have attached; convinced that, though for a time the authority of both was doubted, they could not ultimately have found a place in the canon, unless their claims to general reception, as books of scripture, had been fully and clearly established.*

(2.) But it is of importance to ascertain the probable *date,* as well as to satisfy ourselves respecting the *genuineness,* of the second Epistle of Peter, before we enter upon an investigation of the Apostle's meaning, in the words of our text; and, as far as can be collected from the Epistle itself, it appears to have been written a short time before the death of its author. In the first chapter, Peter adverts, with a composure befitting so aged and venerable a servant of Christ, to that event which was soon to put an end to his labours and sufferings. *I think it meet,* says he, *as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me;*† meaning, in all probablity, by a violent and ignominious death.‡ From this passage we incidentally learn, that the second Epistle of Peter was written at a time when its author was in constant expectation of being summoned, to bear his dying testimony to the truth of the Gospel. This

* See Note C. † 2 Pet. i. 13, 14. ‡ John xxi. 18, 19.

event, if we may credit a favourite legend of the Catholic Church, took place at Rome, at the same time with the martyrdom of Paul,* when Peter is reported to have been by his own desire, crucified with his head downwards; wishing, as it is said, that his sufferings on the cross should be more painful than those of his Divine Master, and deeming it too great an honour to be crucified in an erect posture, lest it should be thought that he affected to place himself upon an equality with his Lord and Saviour.† But,—not to dwell upon the questionable character of the feeling which could have dictated such a wish, or the dubious authority on which the story itself hangs,—there is a passage towards the end of the third chapter of this very Epistle, in which Peter alludes to the obscurity of Paul's writings, and speaks of ALL *his Epistles*‡ in terms which it would have been neither prudent nor decorous to have used, if the author of them had been still living.§ Hence it has been inferred, and apparently with good and sufficient reason, that Peter survived Paul; and that when he composed his second Epistle, he was in possession of the whole of that Apostle's writings in a collective form.‖ But Paul is universally admitted to have suffered martyrdom at Rome, in the persecution under Nero, which commenced in the autumn of the year 64.¶ The second Epistle of Peter, therefore, was probably composed at the end of that year, or some time in the course of the year following, just before the breaking out of that memorable war which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem: and this leads me to observe,

(3.) That it is in a great measure *prophetic* of the events which were to mark that interesting period, and particularly of those which were likely to affect the state and prospects of the Christian church. Among these

* See Note D. † Tillemont, Mem. Eccles. S. Pierre. T. I. Art. 36.
‡ 2 Pet. iii. 16. § See Note E. ‖ See Note F.
¶ Moshem. Instit. Maj. Sæc. i. P. i. C. v. § xiii.

events, the corruptions of the apostolic doctrine, by the persons to whom Peter alludes in my text, and the conduct and fate of those persons, occupy a prominent place. *There* WERE *false prophets* AMONG THE PEOPLE, *even as there* SHALL BE false *teachers* AMONG YOU, *who* PRIVILY SHALL BRING IN *damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* The Apostle, let it be observed, is not here describing what IS, but foretelling what IS TO COME; and those of the sacred writers who survived the overthrow of the Jewish state, lived to see his predictions amply verified. *Little children*, says John, *it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come*, EVEN NOW *are there many Antichrists*,* or many systems of false doctrine: for as the word "Christ," in several passages of scripture, is put for *the Christian doctrine*, so the word "Antichrists" would seem here to denote *false or corrupt forms of Christianity.*† But the evidence which the Epistle of Jude supplies to the same purpose, is of a still more remarkable and decisive character. THERE ARE *certain men* CREPT IN UNAWARES, *who were* BEFORE OF OLD *ordained to* THIS CONDEMNATION, *ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*‡ Few, I apprehend, can hear this passage, even in the form in which I have quoted it, from our authorized translation, and fail to trace in it a record of the fulfilment of Peter's prediction respecting the clandestine manner in which the heretical doctrines of the Gnostics would be introduced into the Christian church; nor would it be possible to frame a closer or more faithful commentary upon a great portion of the second Epistle of Peter, than the one with which that of Jude supplies us. There is, however, this important and fundamental difference between the two Epistles.

* 1 John ii. 18. † See Note G. ‡ Jude, ver. 4.

What Peter had represented as still future, Jude describes as present, and taking place as it were before his own eyes. The language of Peter is manifestly that of prophecy: the language of Jude is no less clearly that of narrative. Both allude to the same class of men: but, while the former says that *there shall be*, the latter affirms that *there are* such persons. Peter, calling them *false teachers*, says, that they *will privily bring in damnable heresies:* Jude, styling them *ungodly men*, says, that they *have crept in unawares, and turned the grace of our God into lasciviousness*. Peter describes them as about to *bring upon themselves swift destruction:* Jude remarks, that they were *ordained of old to this condemnation*, or more properly, that their consignment to it had been penned some time ago.* Peter foretells that they will deny the Lord who bought them: Jude charges them with actually so denying them. In short, from a careful comparison of the language of the two Epistles, it plainly appears, that Jude describes the existence of a state of things, of which Peter only announces the approach; and both serve, in a more remarkable manner, perhaps, than any other two books of Scripture, to authenticate and explain each other.

Bearing these important facts in mind, let us now proceed, my Christian friends, to consider the words of our text a little more in detail, and to illustrate them clause by clause; endeavouring, as we advance, to collect and concentrate some of the scattered rays of evidence, as to their fulfilment, which are dispersed over the pages of Scripture and Ecclesiastical History.

I. The first fact which Peter predicts is, the rise of false teachers in the Christian Church.—*There shall be false teachers* AMONG YOU.

The early corrupters of the Christian doctrine, many of whom made their appearance before the end of the

* See Note H.

apostolic age, were, for the most part, men whose conduct would have done little honour to any profession. Their external behaviour was specious; but their sentiments were subversive of everything bearing the name of Christian. They joined the community of the faithful for no other purpose than that of disseminating their false doctrine with more effect; and though they professed to enrol themselves under the banners of Christ, they were in fact secret enemies of Christianity, and did all in their power to debase its value and to tarnish its lustre. It is to these insidious and unprincipled men that the Apostle Peter directs the attention of his readers in the words of our text; and it was in reference to their precursors that Paul exhorted Timothy to *keep that which was committed to his trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called, which some professing had erred concerning the faith.** But during the life of this Apostle, those who were tainted with false notions appear to have separated themselves from the Christian body, and to have made no secret of their doctrines. Phygellus and Hermogenes, abandoning *the form of sound words* which they had heard of Paul, headed the secession of those who *turned away from* him in Asia.† Hymenæus and Philetus, indulging in a spirit of bold and reckless speculation, were led into the avowal and propagation of dangerous error, asserting *that the resurrection was already past,* so as to *subvert the faith of some:* ‡ and of Cerinthus and his deluded followers it is said, that *they went out,*§ or withdrew from the communion of the church, adopting a new name, and avowing a new profession. But succeeding heretics, finding that this plan of voluntary separation was not calculated to promote the object which they had in view, became more wary; and assumed the Christian profession, in

* 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21. See Note I.
† 2 Tim. i. 13—16.
‡ Ibid. ii. 16—18.
§ 1 John ii. 19. See Note K.

order that they might diffuse their poison with more success, and accomplish, by stratagem, what their predecessors had been unable to effect, by a system of open and avowed rivalry. The Apostle Peter, foreseeing this, says, *there shall be false teachers* AMONG YOU; and Jude, who lived to witness the truth of the prediction, denounces these teachers as *ungodly* or impious *men*. This lamentable change seems to have been brought about silently and progressively; but Hegesippus, an ancient ecclesiastical historian,* developes the origin of it in these remarkable words: "After James, who was called *the Just*, had suffered martyrdom in like manner with our Lord, on account of his preaching the same doctrine, Simeon, the son of Cleophas, our Lord's cousin-german, was appointed bishop, whom all preferred as his successor, on account of his relationship to our Lord; wherefore they called the church A VIRGIN; *for it had* NOT YET *been corrupted with vain opinions.* But THEBUTHIS, on account of his not having been made bishop, began *secretly to introduce corruptions* into it from the seven sects existing among the Jewish people."† Then, after enumerating the principal Gnostic sects, from the followers of Simon down to those of Saturnilus, he adds,—"From these have sprung false Christs, false prophets, and false Apostles, who have rent asunder the unity of the church, by their pernicious doctrines against God, and against his Christ."‡ It is indisputable, therefore, that Thebuthis was not only among the earliest, but that he was the very first of those false teachers who remained in communion with the church, for the deliberate purpose of undermining its stability. But of the nature of the corruptions which he introduced, not the most distant intimation is given; nor is any thing said respecting the progress of his innovations. We are simply informed,

* See Note L.

† See Note M.

‡ Euseb. Hist. Eccles. L. iv. Cap. 22.

that the perverse course which he took was the result of disappointed ambition; Simeon's claim to the honour of succeeding James *the Just* having been universally preferred to his own.* For some time, probably, the wound inflicted upon this unhappy man by the loss of his election to the presidency of the Church of Jerusalem was rankling in his bosom. But its effects, in alienating his mind from the truth and converting him into a secret and insidious enemy of the Gospel, appear not to have shewn themselves during the life of Peter. Jude, however, lived to witness the contagious influence of his example, and has placed upon record the important declaration, that, at the time in which he wrote, certain men actually existed in the bosom of the church, answering to the description of the false teachers, whose rise Peter had so distinctly and emphatically foretold.

II. The second fact which the Apostle predicts is the secret manner in which the false teachers would introduce their doctrines among the body of the faithful.—*Who* PRIVILY SHALL BRING IN *damnable heresies.*

Here again Jude contributes, in a most satisfactory manner, to explain and illustrate Peter; but, as the one predicts events, which it is the business of the other merely to record, each has his own mode of presenting the subject to the eye of the reader. Peter, who is tremblingly anxious to preserve *the Christian faith* from corruption, and to warn the members of the church against the danger to be apprehended from the *false notions* which he foresaw would be mixed up with it, alludes to the surreptitious introduction of *these notions;* whereas, Jude, who was cognizant of the *persons* of those who were actively instrumental in disseminating them, selects, as the objects of his animadversion, the characters of *the men* by whom they were introduced.

The secret machinations to which the false teachers

* See Note N.

had recourse, for the purpose of instilling their sentiments into the minds of the unwary, must have been a source of great disquietude to the Christians in the latter half of the first century. For a time these false teachers were sedulously employed in undermining the faith of those who had embraced the apostolic doctrine; and the success, with which their efforts were crowned, may be inferred from the numbers which they had gained over to their cause, and the formidable attitude which they were enabled to assume, when they found it convenient to throw off the mask, and exhibit themselves to the world in their true colours. Comparatively little is known of the arts by which they seduced such multitudes from their allegiance to Christ; and if the Christian world had, by any chance, been deprived of the Epistle of Jude, and the second Epistle of Peter, we should have been at a loss to account, in any satisfactory degree, for the number of followers which they had enrolled under their banners, when they emerged from their obscurity, in the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian.* The word used by Hegesippus, to describe the manner in which Thebuthis corrupted the doctrines of the Gospel, is remarkably expressive. It indicates the secret arts, to which he had recourse for that purpose. True, it is used only in reference to the conduct of an individual who had been disappointed in the attainment of a favourite object, and had secretly determined to take his revenge for the fancied indignity put upon him: but that individual is to be regarded as the representative of a class, who had recourse to the same sinister means, for the purpose of diffusing their sentiments among the mass of Christian believers. The general silence of Ecclesiastical writers on this subject is accounted for by the circumstances so briefly, but significantly adverted to by Peter and Jude. From the former we learn, that the heresies, of which he

* See Note O.

speaks, were *brought in privily;* and from the latter, that the persons, by whom they were introduced, *crept in unawares:** so that the full extent of the injury inflicted upon the Christian cause by Thebuthis, and those whom he secretly enlisted into his service, was unknown, and probably unsuspected, till it developed itself in all its frightful enormity.

The parable of the tares, if not propounded, with an express reference to this state of things, in the early Christian church, must be admitted by all to be strikingly applicable to it. *The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man, which sowed good seed in his field; but* WHILE MEN SLEPT, *his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*†—Prophetic words!—which have been singularly and painfully exemplified, not only in the artful manner in which the Gnostic leaders disseminated their doctrine during the apostolic age, but also in the gradual and silent process by which the pure word of God was choked, by the weeds of heathen philosophy, in subsequent times.

III. The third fact, predicted by the Apostle in our text, is the duplicity by which the false teachers would seek to elude persecution. — *Even* DENYING *the Lord that bought them.*

This clause, which is generally regarded as descriptive of their distinguishing doctrines, seems rather to point to the rule of conduct adopted by them; and particularly to their renunciation of the Christian profession, during the perilous times which were then approaching.

When our Lord exhorted his disciples not to be *afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;* and forewarned them that they should *fear* HIM, *who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into*

* 2 Pet. ii. 1; Jude, ver. 4. See Note P. † Matt. xiii. 24—26.

hell,—he added this solemn and affecting declaration: *Whosoever shall* CONFESS *me before men, him shall the Son of Man* CONFESS *before the angels of God; but he that* DENIETH *me before men, shall be* DENIED *before the angels of God.** An explicit announcement like this, it might be thought, would be alike incapable of misapprehension or perversion. Yet Heracleon, a celebrated Gnostic, who flourished in the early part of the reign of Hadrian, makes a subtle distinction between an *actual* and a *verbal* confession; and says, that "there is a two-fold confession,—one in faith and conversation, and the other with the voice." He then goes on to say, that "the confession with the voice is made before the powers (of this world), and" that "the multitude incorrectly think this the only confession. But hypocrites," he adds, "can make this confession." He therefore decries it as partial, and says, that the other kind of confession will be followed by this partial one, "if need requires and reason demands;" but that "they who do not confess Christ in practice, deny him, although they should confess him with the voice."† On this convenient principle, any one who chose to avail himself of it might deny Christ, in times of persecution, with fancied impunity, if such denial would avail to shield him from the sword of the executioner; and such, in fact, was the practical application, which the Gnostics made of it.‡ This was doubtless the policy of Thebuthis and his followers. They had embraced Christianity, and their names had been enrolled in the catalogue of the faithful. Nor did they throw off their Christian profession, after they had imbibed the erroneous notions which Peter characterizes by the name of *damnable* or destructive

* Luke xii. 8, 9.

† Clem. Alex. Stromata, Lib. IV. p. 502. Some Account of the Writings and Opinions of Clement of Alexandria, by John, Bishop of Lincoln. Chap. vi. p. 314.

‡ See Note Q.

heresies; for it was an essential part of their scheme to incorporate these into the Christian system. But though they professed themselves disciples of Christ, when they found it convenient to do so, in times of persecution, they scrupled not to deny or disown him.*

To this interpretation it may perhaps be objected, that it is unsupported by the corresponding clause in the Epistle of Jude; and if we had no resource but that of arbitrarily rejecting the received reading of that Epistle, or admitting that the word, translated *Lord* in our text, is applicable to the Supreme God alone, the objection might be regarded as valid and decisive. But this is one of those passages, in the consideration of which enlightened criticism steps in to our aid, and at once removes all cause of embarrassment or difficulty. In the authorized version of the received text, Jude is made to charge the false teachers with *denying the only Lord God,* AND *our Lord Jesus Christ;*† but in Griesbach's text the true reading is restored, and the passage, thus amended, stands as follows:—*Impious men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.*‡ Here it is manifest, that the word, upon which the whole question turns, is not used in its highest sense.§ Christ is *our* ONLY *Master and Lord,* to the absolute and unconditional exclusion of all earthly powers; but, at the same time, with the necessarily implied exception of HIM, by whom he was *made both Lord and Christ.*‖ So, it is elsewhere said of him by Paul, that GOD, EVEN THE FATHER, *hath put* ALL THINGS *under his feet; but when he saith* ALL THINGS *are put under him, it is manifest,* adds the Apostle, *that* HE *is excepted, who did put all things under him.*¶ With this necessary limitation, there is a peculiar propriety in calling Jesus Christ *our* ONLY *Mas-*

* See Note R. † Jude, ver. 4. ‡ See Note S.
§ Δεσποτην. See Note T. ‖ Acts ii. 36. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 24—27.

ter; for the phrase is intended to intimate, that he has a claim upon our entire and undivided subjection. The word rendered *Master* implies ownership, and denotes that absolute authority which every man possesses over his own property, and which masters formerly exercised over their slaves. In the New Testament it is used ten times; in five of which it is translated *Lord,* and in five *Master.** It is in two instances applied to God, as the sovereign and absolute ruler of mankind. Thus, when Simeon takes up the infant Jesus in his arms, and blesses God, he says, LORD, *now lettest Thou thy* SERVANT *depart in peace;*† and when Peter and John are released from prison, the Apostles, in allusion to the threat with which their brethren have been dismissed by the rulers, and elders, and scribes, address themselves in prayer to God, and say, LORD,—*grant unto thy* SERVANTS, *that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*‡ But this application of it to the Supreme Being, by no means proves, that it is one of the peculiar and exclusive titles of the Father; for in no less than four out of the five places in which it is rendered *Master,* it is used in reference to human beings, exercising a similar sway over those who stand to them in the relation of *servants* or slaves. Thus, the Apostle Paul says, *Let as many* SERVANTS *as are under the yoke count their* MASTERS *worthy of all honour;—and they that have believing* MASTERS, *let them not despise them, because they are brethren.*§ And again:—*Exhort* SERVANTS *to be obedient unto their* MASTERS.‖ The Apostle Peter, using the word in a similar connexion, says, SERVANTS, *be subject to your* MASTERS *with all fear.*¶ From these passages we are enabled to pronounce with confidence, respecting the meaning of the word, as used by the writers of the New

* Luke ii. 29; Acts iv. 24; 2 Pet. ii. 1; Jude, ver. 4; Rev. vi. 10; 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2; 2 Tim. ii. 21; Tit. ii 9; 1 Pet. ii. 18.

† Luke ii. 29. ‡ Acts iv. 24, 29. § 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

‖ Tit. ii. 9. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 18.

Testament. It is applied to the owners of slaves, as having a claim to their obedience and subjection; and to God, as having an absolute and sovereign right in his creatures.

When, therefore, the false teachers, to whom Peter refers in our text, are charged with *denying the Lord that bought them*, there is an evident allusion to the conduct of apostate slaves. Agreeably to a common figure in the sacred writings, the wicked are represented as the *slaves of sin*, and as *selling themselves to commit iniquity*. From this state of slavery, those who are converted to the religion of Jesus Christ, and led to embrace the Gospel, are sometimes said to be *ransomed*, and sometimes to be *purchased*. The former of these expressions properly denotes, that they are restored to a state of liberty; the latter implies, that they become the property of a new master.* But in scriptural language, he who is emancipated from the bondage of sin, is still regarded as the property of Him, whose service is only another name for freedom. Hence it is said, that we are *not our own*, but *are bought with a price*:† in other words, we are not emancipated in such a sense, as to be at liberty to act, and to dispose of ourselves as we please, but have only exchanged masters; and, from being the servants of sin, are become the servants of Jesus Christ. As such, it is the duty of all professing Christians to remain faithful to him, and on no plea whatever, to abandon or neglect his service; and it was simply because the false teachers violated their engagements in this respect, and apostatized from him, in the hour of persecution and trial, that they are charged with *denying the Lord*, or Master, *who bought them*.‡

IV. The fourth and last fact, predicted by the Apostle Peter, respecting these false teachers, is, that, in re-

* The words here meant are λυτροῦμαι and ἀγοράζομαι.

† 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. ‡ See Note V.

nouncing their allegiance to Christ, with a view to their own personal safety, they would incur dangers which they might otherwise have escaped: — *and bring upon themselves* SWIFT DESTRUCTION.

It is difficult to determine, with any degree of precision, what is here meant by *swift destruction*. Many commentators suppose, that the loss of salvation in a future world is intended; and we have our Lord's own authority for asserting, that those who deny him before men, as the early Gnostic teachers did, will incur a heavy weight of responsibility, and expose themselves to all the alarming consequences of a just and righteous retribution. This idea appears to have strongly impressed the Apostle's mind, when he composed the latter part of the chapter; where he points out the enviable state of those who never knew the truth, in comparison with the portion of those who apostatize from it.* But, though the word rendered *destruction*,† is sometimes applied, in scripture, to the punishment of the wicked in a future world, it much more frequently denotes the loss of life in the present;‡ and from the use of the accompanying epithet *swift*, it may be presumed, that it is temporal destruction which is here intended.

On this presumption two interpretations of the Apostle's words offer themselves to our notice.

(1.) Peter, foreseeing that the religion of Jesus would survive all the difficulties which stood in its way, and that it would succeed in permanently establishing itself in the world, in defiance of all opposition, may be supposed to have had in his eye the comparatively short duration of the Gnostic sects, when he penned these words; and, if this be his meaning, there is, doubtless, considerable force in the representation which he gives of the swiftness of the destruction with which the false

* Vers. 18—22.

† Απωλεια.

‡ Simpson's Essays on the Language of Scripture, Vol. I. No. I. Chap. i. Sect. ii. pp. 31, 32.

teachers would be overwhelmed. The disappearance of Gnosticism was as sudden and as striking as its rise had been; and the period of its triumph was as nothing in comparison with the duration of Christianity. It swept over the moral and religious world like a hurricane. At the time when Peter wrote, it was a thing unknown in the bosom of the church. By the middle of the second century, however, it had diffused itself through every part of the Jewish, Christian and Heathen world. But at the commencement of the third, it had almost died away; and though an abortive attempt was made by Priscillian, in Spain, to revive it, under a modified form, towards the end of the fourth, its very name soon perished from the earth, and, except in the volumes of the learned, and the cabinets of the curious, scarcely a vestige of it now remains.* But,

(2.) It may be questioned whether the Apostle's words are susceptible of so extended an application. He seems to allude more particularly to the false teachers by whom the Church of Jerusalem was about to be infested; and says of them, that they shall BRING UPON THEMSELVES *swift destruction.* Jude likewise speaks of them as having been *consigned some time ago to this punishment;*† meaning, as it would seem, that the punishment which awaited them, while he was writing, had been announced, some years before, by the Apostle Peter, in the very words which we are now considering. If this be the true interpretation, the Epistle of Jude was probably written about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, when the body of the faithful, who remained steady to their principles, were preserved, in a most signal manner, amidst the general devastation, by adopting the precaution suggested by our Lord, in the prediction of that memorable event, and fleeing to the mountainous district beyond Jordan;‡ while the false teachers, who

* See Note X. † See Note Y. ‡ See Note Z.

vainly expected that they should be enabled to ensure their own safety by renouncing their allegiance to Christ, and trusting to an arm of flesh, fell into the snare which they thought to have escaped, and were overwhelmed with sudden and irremediable destruction.

Here, again, we may appeal to the words of our Lord, in the parable of the tares, as prefiguring, in a most striking manner, the fate of these wretched men.

It is not within the province of fallible mortals, nor was it the prerogative even of the purest Christian Church which has ever yet existed, to sound the depths of the human heart, and to pass sentence of exclusion upon presumed heretics. The church, like the world, must always contain a mixture of the good and the bad, the sincere and the corrupt, the honest and the hypocritical: nor is a formal separation of these two classes practicable by any human means. Our Divine Master, therefore, not only discourages, but expressly prohibits the attempt to make it, on the broad ground, that his followers do not possess the requisite knowledge of the human heart to enable them to effect such a distribution. The servants of the householder would have *gone and gathered up the tares;* in other words, they would have excommunicated those whom they suspected of heresy. But the householder said, *Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.**

The Church of Christ, my brethren, is happily not infested, in the present times, by men, holding such dangerous opinions as those which were propagated by the false teachers to whom the Apostle alludes in my text; and it is highly improbable that errors, as delusive and

* Matt. xiii. 29, 30.

pernicious as those of Gnosticism, should ever again make their appearance in the Christian world; or that any persons, bearing the name of Christians, however unworthily, should be placed in a situation, in which they will deem it expedient to apostatize from the faith, with the view of saving themselves from the sword of the persecutor. Yet there are not only individuals, but whole classes of men in our own age, of whom it may be said, in a sense not very widely different from that in which it is affirmed of the false teachers in our text, that they *deny the Lord who bought them:* some, by a desertion of his service, and a defection from his cause; some, by a concealment of their opinions; some, by conniving at a usurpation of his authority; and some, by the evil tenour of their lives.

First;—Those who, after professing attachment to Christian principles, desert the cause to which they stood pledged, and join the ranks of unbelief, cannot be fairly acquitted of this charge.

The man who has been educated in the Christian faith, and trained to the observance of Christian institutions, *denies the Lord who bought him,* when he throws off his allegiance to Christ; and, either openly or covertly, rejects his claim to a divine mission. Such a man, however unconsciously to himself, must always owe a large debt of obligation to the Divine Author of Christianity. His character has been moulded under the influence of Christian principles, which have become, as it were, an inseparable part of his moral and spiritual nature, and of which it is utterly impossible that he should be able to divest himself. It has been remarked, indeed, (and the observation, I am persuaded, will be found to be substantially correct,) that, "in a country where divine revelation is possessed, and where its truths are in general currency, there will always be found, amongst those who reject its authority, a great deal of unacknowledged obligation to it. 'Truths,' it has been said, 'are brought

forward by persons of this description, as the result of their own unassisted investigation, which, without the aid of revelation, were never discovered by philosophers of the most sagacious and comprehensive minds; and for the knowledge of which, they are, in reality, indebted to that very revelation which they disbelieve and contemn. They thus borrow from the armoury of God the very weapons with which they oppose his cause. They pilfer fire from the altar of Jehovah, to burn the sacrifice at the shrine of their own wisdom. They abstract the coin of heaven, and proudly stamp it with the image and superscription of reason."* But if these remarks are true, in any sense, of the mass of unbelievers in a Christian land, what a lively picture do they furnish of the speculative theist, who has been nurtured in the bosom of the Christian church, and who owes to the salutary influence of the Gospel all that is elevated in his conceptions of the Divine character, and all that is ennobling in his views of the obligations and destiny of man!

Secondly;—Those Christians who, for the sake either of escaping disgrace and privation, or of securing to themselves temporal advantages of any kind, belie their own convictions, by countenancing opinions and acquiescing in a mode of worship which they deem unscriptural, are guilty of that which, if not strictly identical with *denying the Lord who bought them*, will be found to be very closely allied to it.

Persons of this class, it is true, cannot be charged with renouncing their Christian profession; but had they lived in the days of heathen persecution, it is more than probable that their constancy would have shrunk from the test, and that they would have been far from exhibiting that active devotedness to the service of their Lord, which distinguished the Christian confessors of those perilous

* The passage above quoted is taken from *Dr. Wardlaw's Discourses on the Socinian Controversy. Disc* i. p. 1; but what connexion it has with "the Socinian Controversy," it is not very easy to perceive.

times. Could we be suddenly transported back to a state of things as uncongenial as the present is favourable to the profession of Christian sentiments, how few, indeed, are there among the number of those who occupy the foremost ranks among our modern zealots, that would be prepared to witness a good confession! The splendid lures of an endowed and wealthy establishment have ensnared the consciences of thousands, and done more to destroy the simplicity and integrity of the Christian character, in modern times, than all other causes put together. Nor can it be denied, that a state of ease and security is commonly as fatal to the interests of the Gospel as one of suffering and persecution. He who sheds his blood in attestation of the truth is not the only martyr: nor is he the only apostate who, in words, renounces his fidelity to Christ, for the purpose of ensuring his own personal safety. Every Christian believer confesses his Divine Master, who openly, and unreservedly, and regardless of consequences, avows his conviction of obnoxious truth, and enters his protest against prevailing error; and every one denies him, who, for the sake of advancing his own worldly interests, or escaping popular odium, remains in communion with a church whose doctrines he disbelieves, or habitually conforms to a mode of worship of which his own heart disapproves.

Thirdly;—They who recognize in any man, or in any body of men, a power to enjoin terms of communion which Christ has not enjoined, or to prescribe articles of faith which he has not prescribed, may be said to *deny the Lord who bought them.*

Allegiance, in all things pertaining to our Christian profession, is due to Jesus alone, *who is the sole Master and Lord of Christians;* and when we transfer that allegiance to another, we, in effect, deny him. It is immaterial whether the power to decree rites and ceremonies, and to judge in matters of faith, be assumed by a conclave of priests, or by a legislature, or by the civil magistrate,

or by some pretended spiritual head. In all such cases the authority of Christ is virtually usurped, and allegiance is transferred to a foreign power, by all who acquiesce in the usurpation. Now we, as a body of Unitarian Dissenters, utterly reject all such authority, as an invasion of the prerogative of Christ, to whom alone we profess subjection in all spiritual matters. His supremacy, in the fullest and truest sense of the term, is the very badge of our profession; and this is our peculiar motto:

> Let Cæsar's due be ever paid
> To Cæsar and his throne;
> But consciences and souls were made
> To be THE LORD'S alone.—WATTS.

Fourthly, and lastly;—They who in words confess Christ, but turn a deaf ear to his instructions, and remain unimpressed by the warnings and threatenings of his Gospel, are chargeable, in a most awful and alarming sense, with *denying the Lord who bought them.*

This is, in truth, the sum of what our text teaches us, concerning the subjection which we owe to Christ, as our *only* proper *Master and Lord;* including all that has been advanced, under the three preceding heads, with whatever else it concerns us to practise as his true and genuine disciples. Our faith may be pure, and our worship scriptural; we may continue steadfast to our Christian profession, and make our boast in Jesus, as the only rightful lawgiver and king in his church; but what will all this avail, if we neglect to profit by the means of grace and holiness with which the Gospel supplies us? As Christ *gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity,* in vain will he have died, with respect to those who continue unmindful of the solemn obligations which they have contracted, by taking upon themselves the Christian name. Let us not be tempted then, my brethren, to prevaricate with our own souls, and to *deceive our own hearts,* in this important matter. Let

the love of Christ constrain us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and who rose again from the dead. We must expect, indeed, to encounter trials and discouragements of various kinds, in following out the duties of our Christian calling. Surrounded on every side by a mass of anti-christian error, and regarded with a jealous and evil eye by a large portion of the Christian world, our position, it must be confessed, is a peculiarly arduous one. All these things are against us. But our course is clear; and our reward, if we continue steadfast, will be sure and ample. *If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him: but if we* DENY *him, he also will* DENY *us.** Under the influence of this persuasion, let us keep our eyes steadfastly fixed on the great captain of our salvation; not forgetting the vows by which we have bound ourselves to follow in his steps and to yield obedience to his commands: and however severe the discipline which we may have to undergo, or however trying the service which we may be appointed to perform, let us never desert our banners, or join the ranks *of those who draw back unto perdition*, but rather, like faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, strive to have our portion with *those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

* 2 Tim. ii. 12.

NOTES.

Note A. P. 2.

The word *Gnostic* is an Anglicized form of the Greek Γνωστικος, and is currently used by ecclesiastical writers to denote one who boasts of a superior knowledge of divine things. "Gnostici propter excellentiam scientiæ sic se appellatos esse, vel appellari debuisse gloriantur."—*Augustinus de Hæresibus.* Cap. VI.

Note B. P. 2.

Of the tenets of the Gnostic teachers who preceded Valentinus we know comparatively little. The best modern work upon this subject is Ittigius's, *De Hæresiarchis Ævi Apostolici et Apostolico proximi, seu primi et secundi a Christo nato Seculi Dissertatio. Lips. Anno* MDCXC. His account of the heresiarchs of ancient times is brief, but may in general be relied upon for its accuracy. The Preface contains a valuable catalogue of the principal Heresiologists, with a critical account of their writings.

Note C. P. 5.

"The learned Grotius, in his Annotations on this Epistle, observes, 'that many of the ancients were of opinion that this was not an epistle of St. Peter the Apostle, induced thereunto by the difference of style between this and the first epistle, (acknowledged by Eusebius and Jerome,) and by this epistle's having been rejected by many churches.' Huetius reports the case more accurately, and tells us, that this second epistle was 'reckoned doubtful by some, because the style of it was different from that of the first epistle.' This is the truth of the case, and this is the only reason to be found in antiquity of the doubt concerning this epistle. Grotius's second reason, that this epistle was not received in many churches, is too strongly expressed and not sufficiently warranted. The whole doubt is founded upon a piece of criticism, started at first, probably, by some man of learning and figure, and followed implicitly by others. The usage and authority of the church, for aught that appears to the contrary, were on the side of the epistle, and prevailed at last against the learned observation; which was the very case of Jude's Epistle, which, for a like reason, was rejected by many; but the general authority of the church prevailed to establish it. 'Autoritatem vetustate et usu meruit, et inter sanctas Scripturas comparatur.' *Hieron. Catal. Script. Eccl.*"—See the first of *Four Dissertations,* annexed to Sherlock's *Discourses on Prophecy.* 5th Ed. pp. 175—178.

Note D. P. 6.

It has been contended, by many writers of eminence, and on what certainly appear to be good and sufficient grounds, that Peter never was at Rome. The question is discussed, with considerable ability, in a little work, entitled, *A Modest Enquiry whether St. Peter ever were at Rome, and Bishop of that Church?* 4to. *London*, 1687.

Note E. P. 6.

"And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

Note F. P. 6.

This is the opinion of Dr. Macknight, as stated in his note on 2 Pet. iii. 16; and if it be well founded, we need not go, with the author of *Palæoromaïca*, to the heretical Marcion, for the first *Apostolicon*. (Disq. v. p. 316.) It is not improbable, that all the Epistles of Paul, but more particularly those which are addressed to entire communities, were forwarded to Peter by distant friends, soon after they were written. Every thing in the personal history of these two Apostles concurs to render it probable, that neither of them was allowed, for any length of time, to remain a stranger to the proceedings of the other.

Note G. P. 7.

The name Christ is not unfrequently used, in the Epistles of the New Testament, for *the religion of Christ*.—Gal. iii. 24; Eph. iv. 20, 21; Phil. i. 15—18; Heb. xiii. 8. The phrase to be in Christ also denotes *to be a Christian*.—1 Cor. xv. 18; 2 Cor. xii. 2; Gal. i. 22; Phil. i. 13; 1 Pet. iii. 16. *Christians* are represented as *one body* in Christ—Rom. xii. 5; and God is said to have purposed, in the fulness of time, to *gather together in one all things* in Christ.—Eph. i. 9, 10. The word Antichrist, therefore, may very naturally be supposed to mean, *that which is substituted for the religion of Christ*, or *false doctrine*; and thus to be only another name for *Gnosticism*. This sense of the preposition αντι, in composition, is not unusual. Thus, αντι-βασιλευς means *a king's substitute*, not his *adversary*, and corresponds with our word *viceroy*; and ανθυπατος is not *one who sets himself in opposition to a consul*, but *a proconsul*. In the word αντιθεος, which Homer applies to Agenor, the preposition αντι is used in the same substitutional sense.

Πηλειδης δ' ὡρμησατ' Αγηνορος αντιθεοιο
Δευτερος. Iliad. xxi. v. 595.

Note H. P. 8.

The adverb παλαι, which I have interpreted *some time ago*, but which the authors of the received translation have rendered *of old*, is employed by the writers of the New Testament with considerable latitude. In Heb. i. 1, where it is translated *in time past*, it carries the reader back to the age of prophecy. In 2 Pet. i. 9, where the Apostle speaks of a man's being *purged from his* OLD *sins* (των παλαι αὐτου αμαρτηματων,) it applies to what has occurred within the natural period of human life. For a still more confined application of this word, the reader may consult Mark xv. 44:—*He asked him whether he had been* ANY WHILE *dead*:—(ει παλαι απεθανε.)

Note I. P. 9.

Certe constat ex S. Pauli verbis, 1) Versatam tum temporis fuisse inter Græcos disciplinam quamdam, cui amici ejus nomen γνωσις darent. 2) Eam minime obscuram et occultam fuisse. Nam ut de re in vulgus nota vir divinus loquitur. 3) Eam bono hoc et nobili nomine indignam prorsus ipsi visam esse. Falso enim, id est, temere et sine causa sic eam dici, clare significat. 4) Professores ejus cum Christiana religione commenta sua componere voluisse. Nemo enim si hoc tentasset, cur Timotheum monuisset, ut ab hac sibi secta cum maxime caveret, atque depositum veri coelestis, quod ipsi commissum erat, purum et illibatum ab istiusmodi nugis servaret. 5) *Oppositiones* quasdam sive αντιθεσεις in ore habuisse disciplinæ illius professores: quas quum unice vir divinus nominet, in eis caput et quasi medullam totius, quam tradebant, scientiæ positam fuisse nemo dubitaverit.—*J. L. Moshemii De Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum Magnum Commentarii.* 4to. *Helmstadii.* 1753. *Cap.* i. § xxiv. *Not.* (***), *p.* 20.

"It is clear from the words of St. Paul, 1st, That there was a particular species of philosophic discipline prevalent amongst the Greeks of his time, *to which his friend would understand him to allude by the appellation* γνωσις.* 2ndly, That it was not a system cultivated in retirement and privacy, for he speaks of it as a thing openly known, and familiar to the public. 3rdly, That it appeared to him undeserving of such a high and august title; for he says that it is 'falsely' (by which we must understand him to mean improperly and without reason) 'so called.' 4thly, That those who were addicted to this philosophy had been endeavouring to blend its doctrines with those of the Christian religion: for if no one had attempted this, with what propriety could he have admonished Timothy to beware of this sect, and to keep that deposit of divine truth, which had been committed to his trust, pure and uncontaminated by any admixture with such vain and trifling theories? 5thly, That the professors of this sort of discipline maintained the existence of certain antitheses or oppositions, which, since they are the only circumstances relating to it that are noticed by the Apostle, may, without doubt, be considered as having constituted the essential and fundamental principles of the system."—*Translation by R. S. Vidal, Esq. Vol.* I. *p.* 40, *Note* [*n*].

* The clause "cui amici ejus nomen γνωσις darent," which Mr. Vidal renders, "to which his friend would understand him to allude by the appellation γνωσις," ought to have been rendered,—*to which its friends gave the name* γνωσις.

Note K. P. 9.

I have ventured to call the seceders, to whom John alludes in his first Epistle, "Cerinthus and his followers," because these appear to have been the only class of persons in the apostolic age, *who denied that* Jesus *was the* Christ. (1 John ii. 22.) The notion entertained by Dr. Burton, and set forth by him in his Bampton Lectures (No. viii.), that the opinion of the Ebionites on this subject coincided with that of the Cerinthians, has been satisfactorily refuted by a writer in *The Unitarian Magazine and Chronicle, for April*, 1834.

Note L. P. 10.

Hegesippus was a converted Jew, who flourished between the reigns of Hadrian and Marcus Antoninus; and was contemporary with Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, and Irenæus. He published a work, entitled Ὑπομνηματα, or *Memorials*, in five books, of which Eusebius made considerable use in the composition of his Ecclesiastical History. These memorials, as may be inferred from the few fragments of them now remaining, contained an outline of the affairs of the Christian Church, from the age of the Apostles down to the author's own time, with occasional notices of the progress of the Gnostic heresies.

Note M. P. 10.

The seven sects to which Hegesippus alludes are, the Essenes, the Galileans, the Hemerobaptists, the Masbotheans, the Samaritans, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees.—*Euseb. Hist. Eccles. L. iv. Cap.* 22. Justin Martyr, alluding to the sects existing among the Jews, particularly specifies *seven*, calling them "the Sadducees, and the like sects of the Genists, Merists, Galileans, Hellenians, Pharisees and Baptists." These, he tells us, no orthodox person would call *Jews*, any more than he would give the name of *Christians* to those who follow human dogmas, instead of the teachings of God. —*Dial. cum Tryphone Judæo, p.* 307. *A.* Epiphanius also recognizes the existence of *seven* Jewish sects before the advent of Christ: but the names by which he designates them are, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Ossenes, the Nasarenes, the Hemerobaptists, and the Herodians.—*Responsio ad Epist. Acacii et Pauli.* § ii.

Note N. P. 11.

The history of Thebuthis has its exact counterpart in that of Valentinus, another celebrated Gnostic. Both were men of disappointed ambition, and of pre-eminent talent for the consummation of mischief. Both had been nurtured in the bosom of the Church; and the impelling motive of each for quitting its communion was the same. Tertullian says of Valentinus, as Hegesippus had previously recorded concerning Thebuthis, that he hoped to be made a bishop; but being offended, that another's claim was preferred to his own, he left the Church, and began to assail the truth. "Speraverat

episcopatum Valentinus, quia et ingenio poterat et eloquio: sed alium ex martyrii prærogativa loci potitum indignatus, de ecclesia authenticæ regulæ abrupit, (ut solent animi pro prioratu exciti, præsumptione ultionis accendi,) ad expugnandam conversus veritatem."—*Adv. Valentin. Cap.* iv. *p.* 251. *D. Ed. Priorian.* 1663.

Note O. P. 12.

Quonam tempore principes Gnosticorum sectæ conderentur, non convenit inter viros doctos..... Antiquiores esse inter Christianos sæculo secundo et Hadriani tempore motus ex sententiis Gnosticis natos, et nonnullos iis deditos multos in partes suos traxisse, atque cum discipulis suis separatos conventus egisse, non ex Apostolorum tantum epistolis, verum etiam aliis ex monumentis, testatissimum est. Neque huic rei Clementis et Hegesippi loci adversantur: qui quidem hoc tantum dicere videntur, Trajani et Hadriani temporibus, errorum doctores majori, quam antea, audacia rem Christianam turbasse, atque publice, quod dudum clam et timidius fecerant, dissensum suum cum reliquis Christianis professos esse, coetibusque suis firmandis et amplificandis studuisse: Quamquam Hegesippi loco, utrum ad ecclesiam, tantum Hierosolymitanam, quod doctissimi viri contendunt, an, quod alii putant, ad universam ecclesiam referri debeat, disputari potest. Sæculo nempe primo tenues et obscuri, neque satis compositi erant coetus eorum, qui ex sensu veteris Magorum philosophiæ Christianæ religionis dogmata metiebantur: ineunte vero secundo sæculo, in apertam ex obscuritate lucem prodibant, certisque ducibus adscitis, stabilem sibi formam, certasque leges præscribebant.—*Moshem. De Rebus*, &c. *Sæc.* i. § lx. *Not.* (***), *p.* 180.

"Learned men are not agreed as to the time when the first sects of the Gnostics were founded..... That dissensions, arising out of the attempt to blend the principles of Gnosticism with Christianity, had been generated in the churches previously to the second century and the reign of the emperor Hadrian, and that some of those who were devoted to those principles, having drawn to them a number of partizans, had proceeded to the length of holding separate assemblies with their disciples is most manifest, not only from the apostolic epistles, but also from other ancient monuments. Nor is this at all opposed by the words of Clement or Hegesippus. For it should seem that what these writers say may, in fact, be considered as amounting merely to this, that in the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, the patrons of heresy came forward with greater boldness than before, and laying aside the caution and reserve with which they had hitherto maintained their doctrines, made open profession of their dissent from the rest of the Christians, endeavouring likewise, by every means in their power, both to augment the number of their partizans, and also to place their different sects or fraternities on a firm and stable basis: though, with regard to what is said by Hegesippus, it may perhaps admit of a question, whether it is to be considered as relating merely to the church of Jerusalem, as some of the learned imagine, or, as others conceive, to the church at large. In short, the fact appears to have been, that during the first century the sects formed by those who were for interpreting the doctrines of Christianity according to the principles of the ancient

philosophy of the Magi, were neither large nor held in much account, their internal organization being at that time very imperfect; but that, about the commencement of the second century, they burst through the obscurity by which they had been enveloped, and assumed for themselves a regular determinate form, under certain acknowledged leaders, and subject to a system of laws and regulations peculiarly their own."—*Translation by R. S. Vidal, Esq. Vol.* I. *pp.* 308, 309, *Note* [*y*].

The passages which gave rise to the preceding remarks of Mosheim, are as follow: Clement, having just said that the doctrine which the Apostles taught, till the time of Paul's ministry, was completed in the reign of Nero, adds,—κατω δε, περι τους Αδριανου του βασιλεως χρονους, οἱ τας αἱρεσεῖς επινοησαντες γεγονασι.—*Stromat. Lib.* vii. *p.* 764; and Eusebius, having given an account of the martyrdom of Simeon, the son of Cleophas, in the words of Hegesippus, goes on to say,—επι τουτοις ὁ αυτος ανηρ διηγουμενος τα κατα τους δηλουμενους, επιλεγει ὡς αρα μεχρι των τοτε χρονων* παρθενος καθαρα, και αδιαφθορος εμεινεν ἡ εκκλησια, ΕΝ ΑΔΗΛΩ ΠΟΥ ΣΚΟΤΕΙ φωλευοντων εισετι τοτε, των, ει και τινες ὑπηρχον, ΠΑΡΑΦΘΕΙΡΕΙΝ επιχειροῦντων τον ὑγιῆ κανονα του σωτηριου κηρυγματος.—*Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib.* iii. *Cap.* 32.

Note P. P. 13.

The word used by Hegesippus is ΥΠΟφθειρειν, which denotes, not merely *to corrupt*, but to corrupt *secretly*, such being the usual force of ὑπο in composition. But the language of Peter and Jude is, if possible, still more expressive of the sinister and underhanded methods, by which the false teachers gained admission into the church, and insinuated their doctrines into the minds of *the unstable*.

ΠΑΡΕΙΣεδυσαν τινες ανθρωποι. *Jude, vers.* 4.

Οἵτινες ΠΑΡΕΙΣαξουσιν αἱρεσεῖς απωλειας. 2 *Pet.* ii. 1.

Παρα in compositis interdum *clanculum* significat, v. c. in παραδηλοῦν *tecte significare*, παραδυναι *clam subire*.—Schleusner.

Note Q. P. 14.

We meet with frequent references, in the writings of the fathers, to the contempt in which martyrdom was held by the Gnostics. On this subject the reader may consult *Iren. adv. Hær. L.* i. *C.* 23. *L.* iii. *C.* 20. *L.* iv. *C.* 64. *Clem. Alex. Stromat. L.* iv. *p.* 481. *B. Tertul. Scorpiace*, and *Hieron. adv. Vigilantium*.

Note R. P. 15.

This is a common meaning of the verb αρνεομαι in the Christian Scriptures. *Matt.* x. 33; *Luke* xii. 9, xxii. 57; *Acts* iii. 13, 14; 2 *Tim.* ii. 12. It stands opposed to ὁμολογεω. *To confess* any one is to acknowledge him: *to deny* is to disown him.

* The time here meant is the reign of the Emperor Trajan.

Note S. P. 15.

The word Θεον is not found in the Alexandrine, Vatican, or Ephrem manuscript; in the Arabic of Erpenius; or in the Coptic, Armenian and Vulgate versions; to which may perhaps be added the Æthiopic. It is also omitted by Ephrem Syrus, Didymus, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Lucifer Calaritanus, Cassiodorus, and the Venerable Bede. On evidence like this, its spuriousness may safely be pronounced unquestionable.

Note T. P. 15.

The generality of Unitarian interpreters contend, that the word δεσποτην, in this place, is used to denote God the Father; and this is the sense given to it by my learned friend and tutor, the Rev. C. Wellbeloved, in his sermon, entitled *Unitarians not Guilty of Denying the Lord that bought them* (pp. 17—21). But a careful examination of the subject has led me to the conviction that this interpretation is erroneous; and I trust I shall not be thought chargeable with any act of disrespect towards that venerated individual, if I state my reasons for differing from him upon this point. (1.) There is nothing in the current classical meaning of the word δεσποτης, to preclude the application of it to Jesus Christ, whether it is used to denote one who possesses absolute sway in a state, or one who exercises uncontrolled power over a family or household. (2.) The repeated use of the word δεσποται in the sense of *masters*, as applied to the owners of slaves, (1 *Tim.* vi. 1, 2; *Tit.* ii. 9; 1 *Pet.* ii. 18,) justifies the application of the word δεσποτην in the passage before us, to Jesus Christ, as the only proper Master of Christians. (3.) It is by no means clear, although it has been so affirmed by Dr. Samuel Clarke, (*Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, *No.* 15, 407*,) Dr. Whitby, (*Last Thoughts*, *Disc.* iv. *p.* 156, *2nd Ed.*,) Dr. Benson *(in loc.)* and others, that the word δεσποτης is never applied to our Lord *elsewhere* in the New Testament: for when the Apostle Paul speaks of a *vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the* MASTER'S *use*, (ευχρηστον τῳ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗ, 2 *Tim.* ii. 21,) the allusion manifestly is to Christ, as the great master of the Christian household. (*Belsham in loc. Conf. Heb.* iii. 6.) Δεσποτης potest et Christi dici. (*Grot. in loc.*) The word δεσποτης is also thought by Grotius to be given to the lamb that opened the seals. Rev. vi. 10. Hæc ad Christum referenda apparet ex superioribus. Rev. iii. 7, 14. Christus δεσποτης [*Dominus*] dicitur et 2 Pet. ii. i. Nam omnis hæc dispensatio patentiæ et severitatis circa Judæos Christo est tradita. Matt. xxi. 44, xxii. 7; Luke xix. 12, 14, 27. (4.) On the supposition that the common English version of the received text, in Jude, vers. 4, is justified by scriptural usage, the rejection of the word Θεον by Griesbach favours the opinion, that δεσποτην was intended to apply to Christ; else, why was it thought necessary to interpolate the word Θεον, in order to point the application more strongly to the Father? (5.) On the supposition that this is one of those passages which fall properly under Mr. Sharpe's canon, the rejection of the word Θεον is still more favourable to the opinion, that δεσποτην was used as a designation of Jesus Christ; because, on striking out the word Θεον, the clause και τον μονον δεσποτην και κυριον ἡμων Ιησουν Χριστον αρνουμενοι must be rendered, according to that canon, *and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.* (6.) There is an evident anti-

thesis between Ὁ ΘΕΟΣ ἡμων, *our* God, and Ὁ ΜΟΝΟΣ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ἡμων Ιησους Χριστος, *our* only Master and Lord *Jesus Christ*. The *ungodly men* who had *crept in unawares* are charged with doing two distinct things:—1st, with *turning the grace of* our God *into lasciviousness*, and 2ndly, with *denying* our only Master and Lord *Jesus Christ*.

Note V. P. 17.

The Scripture, says Paul, *has concluded all under sin;* Gal. iii. 22: *for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace, through* the redemption *which is in Christ Jesus.* (Rom. iii. 23, 24.) We were formerly *the servants* (or slaves) *of sin*, Rom. vi. 17 (for such is the literal meaning of the word δουλοι); and Christ was the agent employed for rescuing us from this degrading bondage. (Matt. xx. 28; 1 Tim ii. 6; Heb. ix. 12; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.) But the purchase was made, not from God, but to Him. (Rev. v. 9.) It was effected by Christ, in the name of his Father; so that, *being made free from* Sin, *we are become the servants of* Righteousness (Rom. vi. 18); which is equivalent to being *servants of* God (ver. 22), and of Christ. (Eph. vi. 6.) This servitude was the boast of the Apostles. Paul, and Peter, and James, and Jude, all style themselves the *servants* (literally, the slaves) *of Christ* (Rom. i. 1; Phil. i. 1; 2 Pet. i. 1; James i. 1; Jude 1); and in so doing, acknowledge him as their rightful Lord and Master. But the false teachers, by their apostacy, disowned their subjection to him, and were therefore said to *deny the Lord who bought them.* "Because the Lord is said to have *bought* the persons who denied him," says Dr. Macknight, "*buying* cannot mean the buying these persons from eternal punishment, but must be taken in the sense in which God is said to have bought the Israelites to be his subjects and people, namely, by working miracles for their deliverance out of Egypt, and their introduction into Canaan. (Exod. xv. 16, Deut. xxii. 6.) In this sense, either God or Christ might be called *the Lord who bought the false teachers.*"—Note on 2 Pet. ii. 1.

Note X. P. 19.

An interesting account of the rise and fall of Gnosticism, and of its influence on the religious and philosophical sects of the first six centuries of the Christian era, is given by *Professor Matter*, in his *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme, 2 Tomes, avec Planches, Paris*, 1828. In the Preface (p. x.) the author acknowledges his obligations to *MM. Münter, Neander* and *Bellermann*. Much valuable information, respecting the opinions of the Gnostics, may be obtained from *the Bishop of Lincoln's* Treatises on the Writings of *Tertullian* (Chap. vii.), and *Clement of Alexandria* (Chap. vi.). There is also a paper in the *Monthly Repository* for 1833 (Vol. VII. N. S. pp. 564, 602), which contains some interesting remarks, on the influence of the spirit of Gnosticism, during the early ages of Christianity.

Note Y. P. 19.

It has been thought that the words οἱ πάλαι προγεγραμμενοι εἰς τουτο το κριμα, rendered, in our authorized version, *who were before of old ordained*

to this condemnation,) have a reference to some prophecy, contained in the Book of Enoch, *(Whitby's Last Thoughts, Dis.* iv. *p.* 158,) from which Jude makes a direct quotation, in the 14th and 15th verses of his Epistle. *(The Book of Enoch the Prophet, translated from an Ethiopic MS. in the Bodleian Library, by Richard Laurence, LL. D., Abp. of Cashel, Chap.* ii. *p.* 2.) But the verb προγραφω, which is never used by the writers of the New Testament as synonymous with προφητευω, is evidently employed in a forensic sense, in this place, and denotes *to adjudge* or *consign.* The time of this adjudication or consignment is indefinitely expressed by the adverb παλαι, which, as I have already observed, in Note H, would have been more properly rendered *some time ago,* than *of old.* ΠΑΛΑΙ. Adverbium, *olim, dudum, antea, jam dudum, jam pridem, jam antea,* et ut *dudum* apud Latinos de quovis spatio temporis præteriti eoque nonnunquam admodum brevi et exiguo usurpatur, ut recte observavit post *Valckenarium* ad *Euripidis* Hippolytum v. 1085, *Fischerus* ad *Platonis* Phædon. § 27, p. 330, ed. recent.—SCHLEUSNER.

NOTE Z. P. 19.

"The people belonging to the Church at Jerusalem, according to a certain oracle, communicated by revelation to approved persons of that place, having been commanded before the war to quit the city, and take up their abode at a certain city of Peræa, which is called Pella; and those who believed in Christ having removed from Jerusalem to that city, so that the saints had as it were abandoned the royal metropolis of Judæa, and the whole Jewish territory; Divine vengeance at length overtook those who had acted so unjustly towards Christ and his Apostles, so as utterly to destroy that impious generation from among men."—*Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib.* v. *Cap.* 5.

ERRATUM:

Page 8, line 18, for "denying them," read *denying him.*

GEORGE SMALLFIELD, PRINTER, HACKNEY.

THE SIMPLICITY OF GODLINESS,

A "TRACT FOR THE TIMES."

T 93
8.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE CHAPEL IN LITTLE PORTLAND STREET, LONDON,

BEFORE THE SUPPORTERS OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 19, 1839,

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE,

BY

THE REV. GEORGE ARMSTRONG, B.A., T.C.D.

Teach me thy way; and lead me in a PLAIN path.—PSALM xxvii.
Παντα αναγκαια, ΔΗΛΑ —CHRYSOSTOM.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR AND SOLD BY THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION, 31, ST. SWITHIN'S LANE; SOLD ALSO BY SMALLFIELD AND SON, 69, NEWGATE STREET; JOHN MARDON, 7, FARRINGDON STREET; AND PHILP AND EVANS, BRISTOL.

1839.

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Non per difficiles nos Deus ad beatam vitam quæstiones vocat.—HILARY.

Perinde quasi cum moroso quopiam agas Dæmone; * * * * ac non cum clementissimo Servatore, qui a nobis præter puram simplicemque vitam nihil exigit.—ERASMUS.

Surely Christ came not to ensnare and entangle us with captious niceties, and to puzzle our heads with deep speculations, and lead us through hard and craggy notions into the kingdom of heaven.—CUDWORTH.

For "The end of the Commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned;" from which charity, and purity, and goodness, and sincerity, some having departed have turned aside unto vain jangling.—JEREMY TAYLOR.

A SERMON.

MICAH vi. 8:

HE HATH SHEWED THEE, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD: AND WHAT DOTH THE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE BUT TO DO JUSTLY, TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD?

So few, yet so comprehensive—so easily to be understood, so important, so wise, so practical, so neglected,—in all ages, and to so wide an extent in all places,—these plain indications of what God would have us to do; and what man's own heart suggests to him, would yet be so prolific a mean of happiness to himself, and honour to his Maker. God, in his mercy, willing that man should be happy;—man, by his instincts and reason, himself desiring to be happy: Yet all the suasion, and all the threatening, all the wisdom, all the goodness, which have emanated from the former, inadequate to that influence over the latter, which should place him in his true position of reverence to his Maker, rectitude to his fellow, and holiness and purity in himself.

This is a marvellous fact—an awful fact. Six thousand years has this "controvery" of God with man been going on; and still, how distant, how dim, the prospect of its auspicious termination! And yet, my hearers, a termination—and auspicious termination—I no less devoutly believe, than I fondly hope, it is among the deep and purposed things of God that this strife shall have.

The very fact of its continuing *so long*, is presumption that God has good in store for his creatures: for were there no *change* in prospect—were there no hope for man—were there never to be joy for the reclaimed of earth amidst the holy and the pure of heaven,—wherefore God's patience with the work of his hands; wherefore God's striving through so many ages and in so many ways; God's presence by his preachers, his leaders, his prophets,—and finally, his consummated mercy in the mission of a greater than all,—seeing man were indeed the fallen being, the hopeless being, the wicked being, the brute being, which so many delight to paint him; and so many, by their exaggerated and impious fictions, would go far to *prove* him to be in point of fact?

From the simple fact, then, that man has been so long in conflict with his Maker,—and that by means so varied, by events so complex, a process of correction would seem to have been going on, ever strong to admonish, though *as yet* ineffectual to reform,—the truth, I think, may be inferred, that, however mortals may account of slackness, the condition of man is one of progress—one of training for ulterior and higher ends; and that his being is continued to him, as his faculties have been given to him, and his varied trials have been furnished to him,—all that his better nature may be more fully developed, his conquests over evil the more securely established, and his perfection wrought out the more completely, the more enduringly—in proportion to the difficulties overcome, and the errors and the lapses into which he has fallen, which *experience* only could disclose, and reflection and repentance only could retrieve.

Despite of the reproaches, justly or unjustly cast upon him, man has still a noble nature; and, in

proportion to its worth, may be the *time* required for its arrival at maturity. In all the higher and nobler forms of organized nature, slowness of developement is a marked condition. And so, alike, of individual and collective Man. Out of his very weakness, destitution, and prostration, may be gathered materials for concluding to God's plans of goodness and of wisdom in dealing with our race: it being *through these* so distinctly seen how abject he can be in the absence of religion,—in the absence of knowledge,—in the absence of that moral and social dignity which grows and strengthens in proportion as these are cherished,—and of those tastes, sensibilities, and enjoyments, which mark at once the capacity and the destiny of a creature, not more wretched in his ignorance and barbarism, than glorious in his rightful attitude of a reasonable, a taught, a religious, and worshiping being.

Man is said to have FALLEN; and, *in a sense*, I know not how he could have escaped so falling; unless he were to have lived under a scheme of perpetual or protracted miracle. Left comparatively to himself—consorting more with his own kind,—less, perhaps, than at first with his Creator, who gave him his perilous but his glorious being,—the chances of his erring, and thereby of sinning, were hardly to be avoided. And the narrative may, perhaps, not unfairly be accepted as importing that man, when left to himself, is a weak being—man, when forgetful of God, is not only a weak but a guilty being; but that, retaining God in his thoughts,—and applying his resources, in submission to him, in the promotion of his happiness, the culture of his intellect, and the enlargement of his knowledge,—how often soever he may err, how deeply soever he may sometimes offend,

—having that God in his heart, loving God's law in the main, and returning in sorrow, repenting in humbleness, and beseeching in faith,—verily he will find him a God who pardons, a father who loves, and a power which, ultimately, effectually, everlastingly, will save.

If, then, it was necessary that man in any part of his being were to be left to himself, just in that crisis the probability arose that man would err—that man would FALL. And, so, the history of our first parent becomes the history of his race. Neither better nor worse than they, by any constitution of his nature—in a period or a moment which found him without God in his sight, or in his thoughts—being tempted—he fell. As it has been from that day to this: the more we are absent from God, the more we are ignorant of God, the more we are careless or thoughtless of God, just so much the more are we in danger of offending him by some or other breach of his law—"to do justly, to love mercy," and by pureness, by reverence, by worship, "to walk humbly" towards Him by whose will we are, and by whose breath we live.

Yet this destitution of God, this estrangement from his law, these violations of the justice, the mercy, and the piety, enjoined by him—not for his own—but his creature's good; not for *his* glory, but for man's: in a word, this ignorance of God, and this injury to his creatures, have more or less found their way into all corners of earth,—and more or less continue to be objects of wonder, of regret, of reproach, of despair, to some; or of effort, humility, and beneficence, to others,—in proportion as the spirit of creed—or of wisdom, of knowledge, of hope, and of love, may happen respectively to prevail.

Some men point—and seem happy to point—to them,

as proofs of the absolute and irretrievable depravity of the nature of man. Other minds see in them, motives for rushing to the rescue of souls which are hasting to final perdition in their utter alienation from God. While a few behold in them marks of that wideness, indeed, yet of that mercy and wisdom in the plans of the Mighty One, which, pitying the ignorance and palliating the error, he beholds, yet supplies in the *misery* which these causes are *sure to engender*, so potent a motive to relieve, yet so ample a task for wisdom to project, and for energy, and enterprize, and circumstance, and *time*, to accomplish the desired relief.

For if God work by means, and especially by means of mind, these means can hardly be expected to work out their end in a day. Knowledge is strong: but asks for its growth, and still more for its diffusion, the needful element of time. The process is hastening—everywhere appliances are accumulating; but though a tide is setting in, it must spread by many channels, and often reach its point by wide circuits. To will is God's, to work is ours; and to abide, in faith, the fulfilment of the promises. We verily believe that the earth will be covered with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea; and have a hope not easy to be quenched, that justice and mercy and truth shall one day find acceptance in every bosom, confession in every tongue, and the homage of a faithful, earnest, and striving obedience in every life. O that that day of the Lord may indeed come! and that witnessed *reign of his Christ* upon earth, by every thought and word and deed of us and ours be hastened in its coming, and augmented in its glory!

And why do we hope this? nay, why even upon

natural grounds alone do we hope this?—because while seeing the evil, the wretchedness, and the wrong that pervade the earth, we see, too, their *causes;* and seeing these causes, already we reach, if we may not ourselves effectively wield, the instrumentality by which they are finally to be overcome.

We know the accepted or current conclusions of theology in this matter. We know of that wonderful machinery of dogmas, which, discarding the simplicity of nature, and the consistency of truth, contrives in *its* darkling theory of a "FALL," and a transmitted depravity, and its astounding process of recovery, a solution of all the phenomena, and a remedy for all the ills, about which we speculate, and from which we suffer: but we cannot so deem of God, we cannot so trifle with fact, as not to perceive, that in a far other and simpler and truer condition of things may be found the exposition and correction, and eventual extinction of the evil and suffering which rest for a time upon this portion of the creation of God.

We see,—alas, with what pangs we see!—that image of God in man obscured and overborne and lost amidst the heaped iniquities, and revolting crimes, and unbridled passions, and mindless, faithless, Godless,—all but hopeless,—stupefaction and ignorance of which the annals of earth are full; and by which we are instructed to measure in all its amplitude the fearful dimensions of the task which God has laid upon us,—has laid upon you,—has laid upon all who fear his name, and know his will, and have his word, to remove that ignorance, to correct those evils, to coerce those passions, and finally and effectually extirpate that crime and violence and wrong: all this we see; but seeing these things in

their *causes*, and reading these causes in their plain, unexaggerated, intelligible, and credible characters,—we go forth to the encounter, strong in our sense of the goodness and wisdom of that God and Father of all, who creating man with power, designing man for greatness, yet proving man by trouble, while judging him in mercy, would have us to see not in *his fall*, but in his weakness, and his *non-age*,—not in any hereditary or dismal taint of nature, determining it to a necessary choice of evil,—but simply in his ignorance and *position*,—the causes and removable causes of the sin, and suffering, and degradation, which for a time, and for ulterior ends of good, are permitted to have place in the order of his works. This is the strength we feel; this is the hope we have. We see evil, but it is *removable* evil. We witness suffering, but it is a suffering,—not the heritage of a corrupted, but rather of a struggling, nature;—not the bitter fruit of a malignant, but the necessary produce of an unformed, and as yet *unthinking* soul. We do not ask from the infant the self-control of a matured and instructed mind; for God ordaining that infancy should be physically weak, it had been the opposite of goodness and wisdom to unite with it a maturity of mind of which it could make no use, and which therefore to it would have been an instrument of pain and evil, not of good.* And so, for a time, the animal nature of the child being *necessarily* in the ascendant,—it results,—not assuredly from any such fiction as "original sin,"—not from any penal or vindictive, but the purely beneficent, appointment of a wise and holy God,—that so much remains for *mind* to do,—so much for culture, religion, and reflection to

* Vide Reid's Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man. Essay II., Chap. 22.

achieve,—so soon as the *aptitude for thought* has arrived, and mind and body have been brought into that nearer proportion, when their mutual influence can be usefully and properly exerted.

Yet, in this interval, what beautiful affections grow up between the dependant child, (because he *is* dependant,) and the ever-watchful, ever-loving, and caressing parent! and how much of bliss on earth, how much of good to souls were lost—had infancy been endued with any less feebleness than it is,—or with any less need of care for the frame, and guidance for the mind, and love for the tender and otherwise perishing being, with which it is thrown upon the affections, and quick finds a home in the heart, of the earthly parent!

Now this is a process which we see; yet it is only the process in some measure modified, by which man is connected with his fellow in those relations of service and beneficence, of teaching, enlightening, and guiding and blessing,—of which God, who is the parent of all ("for we all are his offspring,") has laid the foundation in the penury and dependence of some, and the fulness and abundance of others, of his family of man, —whom he would ennoble and bless by sending them on errands of mercy to the wretched of our kind, whom He wills by our aid to be raised—by our voice to be taught—by our riches to be blessed—and by our light and love to be transformed into doers of justice, lovers of mercy, and worshipers in spirit and in truth of Him who liveth in Heaven, and reigneth in Eternity.

And this is the mission of God's servants throughout all ages of time. They are the salt of the earth. They are the light of the world. Gifted with a body, and dependant for its nutriment on chance or toil, compassed by danger, threatened by want, harassed

by enemies, one half of mankind are unconscious of any such thing as a Soul! Incapable of the energy, or deprived of the leisure, for thought,—intellectually and morally they are as infants of the race; and simply by the exclusive and necessary enslavement to physical want, by which they are bound,—present themselves in that aspect of misery, and need, and darkness, and sin,—for whose gradual, but final removal, God in all times has sent forth faithful instruments of his purpose—bearers of his truth, and witnesses of his goodness—to testify that light should come, that help was near, that evil should not always abound,—and that so much of it as was still to be inseparable from earth,—by faithfulness to duty, by trustfulness in God, would comparatively be lessened,—and, by holiness and happiness in heaven, be finally effaced.

Oh, it is glorious and blessed to see and know how sharp and piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit—even to the separating of the joints and marrow—even to the discerning of men's thoughts and hearts, and intents—is that word and truth of God, which, (like that candle of the Lord within us, never by breath or power of man to be wholly put out,) still lives to teach—still gleams and waves around us, to hew its way through the errors of men, and to bring to us the pure and true and indestructible mind and will and law of God.

For what mystery, or germ of mystery, has been left to fecundate into those systems which are holding the world in sway, and covering the earth with madness,—in those marks of God's pleasure, in the "honored and the glorious of their times,"—in Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel? Wherefore, in the words of *Ecclesiasticus*,

where the praises of these Saints and Patriarchs are recorded,—wherefore were "*all these honored in their generations, and were the glory of their times*"?

Do we not find it told us, (you will read it in the 44th Chapter of that book,) that these all were "merciful" men, and therefore their righteousness was to be had in remembrance? Do we not there find it said that "Enoch pleased God, being an example of repentance to all generations"? Is not Moses, again, called "merciful," and therefore beloved of God and Men; and is he not praised too for his "faithfulness and meekness"? And though I have quoted from a book which is not properly Scripture,—a book which is called apocryphal,—do we not hear in Genesis that "Noah was a just man, and a perfect," or as the margin translates it, "upright," and one that "WALKED WITH GOD"? And are not the Patriarchs honoured for their righteousness and faithfulness in Ezekiel,—and still more largely and memorably honored in the writing to the Hebrews?

Shall I be told that this righteousness meant something *then* which it does not mean *now*? Shall I be told, more especially, that the acceptance of Abel was because of his sacrifice of blood, and not because of his righteousness of life? What! was the righteousness of Abel different from the righteousness of Enoch? Yet what are we told of Enoch? why in Ecclesiasticus, as already stated, that "he pleased the Lord," being "AN EXAMPLE OF REPENTANCE to all generations." And moreover, in Hebrews,* too, with an exposition never sufficiently to be marked and minded,—that he "had this testimony, that '*he pleased God*,'"—and how?—

* Chap. xi. 5, 6.

plainly,—as the connexion in the very next verse demonstrates,—not by his sacrifice, but by his faith—by his trust;—and wherein was the nature, and wherein was the value, of that trust?—Why, as the context goes on, it is that without which it were "impossible to please God;"—seeing it is that which first gives us a God to be pleased; for before we can please him, we "must believe that he is,"—and believing him to be, we dishonor his holy and merciful and righteous nature, in not further believing, that "He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him."

Behold, then,—the faith of Enoch! the faith of the Patriarchs!—the faith of the holy, the just, the merciful, the pious, in all ages, and all dispensations of the world!

Yes: this endeavour to please God, this effort to find God, and the proof of this effort in the doing of justice, and the loving of mercy to men, and maintaining all holiness of demeanour, all holiness of thought, in speaking of, and communing with God; *this* is that faith that pleased God in the olden time, *this* is that faith which would bless earth in all times; and was just that "well-doing," or that *disposition* to "well-doing,"—so far as his opportunities admitted,—the want of which rendered the BLOODLESS OFFERING unaccepted of him who knew what was in the heart of man, and knew that the heart of the FIRST MURDERER was not right towards his Father in heaven, or his brother of earth.

There was no "well-doing," there was no rightful disposition, there were no holy affections; and this it was—not the circumstance of his eucharistical offering happening to be taken from the fruits of the field which he possessed, rather than from the firstlings of a flock which he did *not* possess,—this it was which

occasioned his offering to be rejected, his approaches to be repulsed, and his feigned prayers, his niggard or grudged oblation (as the sacrifices of blood were in after-times) to be counted as iniquity and trouble and weariness and abomination before the Lord.

And here, in passing, I am reminded of a singular—rather a startling—discrepancy which seems to enter into the popular doctrine of sacrifice: namely, that in the Jewish notion of it, it was the disposition of the offerer which gave effect to the sacrifice,—so far, at least, as the higher sanction of God, as distinguished from mere satisfaction of the law, was concerned;—whereas, in the Christian theory, it is the sacrifice which is supposed to give effect to the disposition. Now, we ask, was the disposition of the worshiper the antecedent thing, the main thing, the *whole substantial* thing, in the religious homage of the Jew? And if it were, can it, we ask again, be anything different in the Christian scheme? Can the order of importance be so reversed, that *essence* and *accident* may change places, according as we direct our regards to the Jewish or the Christian worship? If the disposition of the worshiper were the essence of his service, on the part of the Jew, and the sacrifice, in logical phrase, the accident, or to common intelligence, the *aid* merely; can it, in fine, be otherwise in the Christian worship? and can that be the true notion, can that be the worthy notion, which would have us to place the sacrifice foremost in order, while to disposition is assigned the merit of being a necessary, indeed, but merely *subordinate* conjunct?

Between the notion of sacrifice in the two periods, can there, when thus considered, be any parallelism? None.

And this circumstance it is, which relieves the mind

from any apprehension of irreverence in dealing thus plainly with a subject, into which ideas have been infused which do not properly belong to it; and which has been made a repository of sacred feelings,—never to be wounded unnecessarily; but which, being wholly a result of human misconception, in our estimation,—cannot, at whatever cost of pain to others, be pleaded in bar of our claim to pursue, unfold, and promulge, what to *us* is truth as *sacred*, as any the most unquestioned sanctity can be to *them*.

We say then,—between the notion of sacrifice as held in Jewish, and prevailing in Christian times, there can be no parallelism. Will it be said, we seek a parallelism where none was ever pretended to be found,—seeing that under the law, the sacrifices had no moral efficacy whatever;—it being "impossible" that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin"? Well then, we ask,—what was it *had* that efficacy? plainly, that which only remained;—the *disposition* or *implied repentance* of the offerer. If it be said: Ah, there remains another and a better thing besides, namely—the ANTICIPATED EFFECT OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST;—the reply is obvious: we answer, it is arbitrary to apply in other cases, that which clearly did *not* apply in the case of Abraham—the father and model of all the covenant faithful—whose acceptance is referred expressly in the history, to faith *in all the truth he then knew*,—faith in God,—and working by that faith.*

Wherefore, *only* in this disposition—only in the intention of the worshiper,—can we in any period find that "efficacy" which is sought: and alike to Christian as to Jew, God is gracious just so soon, and just so far,

* Genesis xviii. 19; and xxii. 12 and 18. See also Hebrew xi. 8 and 17.

as the affections of the creature are in harmony with the ritual act, or the doctrinal belief which has place in the scheme of his religion.

The truth is,—there is a parallelism—there is an analogy,—and that connexion of type with antitype—of which the writings of divines are so full,—but of which they seem to me to have altogether lost sight, in the amazing, the repugnant, the injurious, the incredible dogma of *that* being signified by the type, and fulfilled in the antitype, which *destroys* the relation they affect to maintain,—and leaves in its place a chaotic mass of contradiction,—perplexity,—monstrosity,—as to which no words I could use, no words I should choose to use, could express my utter incomprehension, or my daily deepening, and more and more invincible repugnance.

For what, in short, does Orthodoxy find shadowed forth in the type which is fulfilled in the antitype? Acceptance with God? But if any such acceptance ensue,—it is from the mind of the offerer, not the blood of his victim, that this consequence flows. A commuted penalty for sin? But the heavier offences of the Jew admitted of no commutation. Perhaps the vicarious substitution of an equivalent death, for the merited death of the offender? But the victim was offered for sins *not* obnoxious to death, and therefore not held to be deserving of it: and offerings of fruits and grain were presented *without any blood-shedding at all*, in cases where the offender was too poor to go to that charge.

In short, in *nothing* can Orthodoxy find the adaptation it seeks for, once the true idea—the real application and analogy—is lost sight of or forgotten,—namely, that in both the Jewish and Christian systems —under the law, and under grace—the death of the sufferer was an *aid to*, as well as a *sign of*, the devo-

tional spirit and purpose of the worshiper :—under the law, through the medium of an elaborate purgation of ceremonial uncleanness, importing the surrender not of the physical but of the spiritual life ; the slaying of his sin, the forsaking of his ways, the renewal of his vows ;—and where a victim was wanting, the defect being supplied by some circumstance in the offering, as in the presence of salt, or the absence of leaven,—designed as an outward and visible sign of an inward and felt emotion. And so, in the purer and plainer religion of the Gospel,—teaching by the fact, and impressing by the memory, of the tragedy on CALVARY,—that for so much love to us we too should love in proportion ;—that as the life of the Deliverer was laid down for us, so our sins, and if need were, *our lives* should be laid down *for him ;*—that as he came to preach to the world repentance,—and so, " to redeem us by turning away," not through any mystical influence, our iniquities from us, but " us from our iniquities,"—and thereupon by wicked hands was crucified and slain,—the just for the unjust,—so, do we crucify him afresh,—reproduce the circumstances which originally brought him to his death —by continuing or renewing our sins; instead of "being buried with him by baptism,"—instead of " crucifying in ourselves the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,"—and so having been planted with him in the likeness of his death,—being raised also by the glory of the Father, in the likeness of his resurrection, —to walk in newness of life—thenceforth no longer to serve sin."

Oh, dear brethren, how happy had been the world, how glorified had been the Gospel, how honoured had been the Saviour, had views so consistent as these with truth, justice, mercy, and holiness, been permitted to have

free course, and find access to the unbiased consideration of human souls!

Yet God, who hath hitherto protected his Gospel, will yet be gracious; will yet work out the means of making it effectual to the saving and blessing of the world. In greater darkness than now prevails—amidst deeper peril than now surrounds—in defiance of power more daring and strong than any which now exists—men's souls have been roused to think, men's hearts have been strengthened for trial. I have said, that, in all ages, God has been giving witness of the primary truths in which he delights; or sending forth notice of some principles essential to the well-being of man in his personal, or social, or religious relations. He sent forth his patriarchs to herald the knowledge of the true God; and to righteous Noah, and to just Lot, and to trustful Abraham, and their successors, through darkling and troublous time, and amidst people and nations where no fear of God—hardly any care of man—had place, the duty was consigned of keeping open the pure stream of holy tradition; teaching that God was "one, and his name One;" and, that, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him," was "THE WHOLE DUTY of man."

In process of time he sent forth his Son, to proclaim to the nations that God would have all men everywhere to repent; to break down the wall of partition between favoured and excluded nations; to make of one fold, and of one heart, all people and all kindred; to proclaim that, as God was the Father of all, so all men should be as brethren: and that, as God was holy and just, and merciful and good—so all men with him, the Son,—their ensample, their friend, their leader, their lord, their head,—should be followers of God as dear

children ; loving him with all their heart, and mind, and strength, and each other as themselves.

Removed from the presence of men, and carried up to that heaven, where only such a spirit could suitably dwell, his Father's business was still to be cherished and tended on earth ; and, committed to faithful hands, the seed which he had sown was watered and sheltered ; and, by the power of that spirit which gave it increase, sprang up into a goodly and vigorous plant.

And truly a vigorous plant it had need to have been ; for much hard treatment, and much bitter exposure it was destined to endure. The faithful witnesses at length removed to their reward,—for other hands and other spirits it was reserved to cherish and visit this plant. But, with crude and uncouth notions of their task, with minds imbued and absorbed in the technical tastes of their age, instead of digging, and watering, and weeding, and properly fencing and sheltering—or even of letting alone, and leaving it to its own free nature—they set about trimming and clipping, and cutting it out into such strange and fantastic shapes, that for ages this otherwise-glorious plant was hardly to be known ! and when men would have examined its character, and gone near, to ascertain in what manner and by what process its original beauty and vigour might still be retrieved, the so-called, or self-called, care-takers, in resentment for the intrusion, and in affected regard for the safety of their charge, *did, indeed,* fence it round with a barrier not easy to be scaled, and warned off as trespassers all such as might be curious or bold enough to make the attempt. But still this plant had a vigour of sap within, which enabled it from time to time to throw out a branch too lofty or too strong for effectual coercion ; and still a shelter was found by

some unheeded or adventurous visiter, who did what he could to pull down *a piece of the wall*, and procure for the prisoner within, that freedom which its nature rejoiced in.

And these efforts succeeded. Tottering long to its fall, at length this wall did come with a crash to the ground: and the world once more beheld, with admiration and enthusiasm, this hitherto-stunted and pent-up plant redeemed to its liberty of throwing above and around it, the branches which were to shelter the nations, and bear fruit for the sustenance of many people and many ages.

Oh happy, honoured era, in comparison with those which had preceded it. But, oh, infatuation of men! scarcely had this new liberty beamed upon the world,—scarcely had the nations begun to taste of the fruits for which they had hungered so eagerly and so long,—when lo! another, though mitigated or modified method of wronging God's people, and oppressing God's truth, was commenced; and the power which fell by its own weight, when lodged in a single hand, was snatched *in its fragments* by many hands: till, in each locality, as opportunity or circumstance favoured, instead of that central and gigantic tyranny which had before held sway, and which, at least, had been clothed with the dignity of age, and the sanctity or mystery of superhuman pretension, there was found to be erected a new and upstart and petty machinery of coercion,—a thing of mere human device,—a thing of mere naked oppression,—the more insulting, from the nullity of its own pretension; and the more distracting, from the rival constructions of truth, and conflicting exactions of conformity, which each intersecting frontier of intolerance presented, in whatever direction the ill-fated

traveller or inquirer might happen to turn! Here, the Anglican doctrines of Henry,—there, the Lutheran doctrines of Torgaw,—on one side, the Helvetic arrangement of the Eucharist,—on another, the Genevan *solution* of eternal decrees;—on no side, alas! a perception of what was due to the dignity of truth, the sanctity of Scripture, the rights of man, or of edifying and acceptable worship of God.

We read in the beginning of Maccabees, that "Alexander, having gone through to the ends of the earth, and taken many spoils of many nations, insomuch, that the earth was quiet before him; therefore, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. At length, in process of time, Alexander, perceiving that he should die, divided his kingdom among his honourable men; and his servants bare rule, every one in his place, and after his death they all put crowns upon themselves; so did their sons after them, many years; and EVILS WERE MULTIPLIED ON THE EARTH."

Now, in this breaking-up of the Grecian monarchy, we think there are circumstances to remind us of the breaking-up of the later and mighty ecclesiastical monarchy. Stupendous conquests had been made. No art, no wealth, no power, had been left unexerted to consolidate a conquest over MIND, which only might be equaled, if equaled, by that conquest over territory, of which the sacred historian has made such short but such pregnant mention. But time, at length, saw this structure, too, in ruins. The original energy which had raised it, no longer remaining, the sceptre which one hand had wielded before, devolved upon successors, who each took a part, and, insisting on his own fragment of authority, well may we believe, as experimentally we know, that "EVILS WERE MULTIPLIED ON THE

EARTH!" Yet, in one point, and that a no slender one, a difference occurs. Alexander, the founder of his empire, had himself allotted their crowns to his successors. By the only recognized power with whom the distribution could lie, they were *given* their authority. But where is the given—where is the rightful —where is the conceivable—authority over the riven dominion of Rome, which reverting to its original source, and belonging of right to Him who alone has power to legislate for souls,—has been SEIZED not given, —been PLUNDERED not conferred,—and acquired by RAPINE not by right,—remains with the holders, by a deed whose sanction and whose title may be found in treason towards their Lord, and usurpation towards their fellow?

We know who has told us that the kingdom of Satan could not stand, if divided against itself. Can we suppose that the kingdom of the Saviour can any better maintain itself, if, alike, surrendered to disunion, and in opposition to itself? Yet such is the position of his kingdom, as administered by the councils of those who act by his assumed authority, and are telling us, that, in every section of Christendom, a separate pale is set up, which only has the attribute of absolute truth belonging to it, and the saving knowledge of him, whom each would claim for patron and guide to itself, and mark out for the enemy and final, everlasting, destroyer of every other. And this is the way in which the religion of peace, the religion of healing, the religion of love, is made to accomplish the ends for which its author and finisher came down from the bosom of the Father to speak to us in all wisdom, to lead us to all holiness, to incur for us all suffering, that he might conquer for himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, and distinguish them here, and exalt

them hereafter, as doers of justice, lovers of mercy, and worshipers of his Father in spirit and in truth!

Yet how can justice, how can mercy, how can worship, subsist as they ought, or what present prospect can we have of their flourishing in their natural vigour—expanding to their promised dimensions—so long as men imagine to themselves the inhuman, anti-social, anti-Christian, DUTY (forsooth!) of propagating a scheme which carries in its front, *interdiction in the present*, and everlasting *reprobation in the future world*, against a branch of the family of the Redeemer, who, with themselves, would testify with their breath, or needed blood,—that he is the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world,—that him to know, together with the Father, is eternal life,—that, to have his spirit, is to have all help, and hope, and joy,—that without him we can do nothing, with him, all things,—that there shall be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust,—and, that, at the latter day, he shall come again to judge the world, when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation! Oh, BLESSED GOD! if there be not *here* provision for bringing all men to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with their Maker, gratefully with their Redeemer,—where, where, within the limits of this universe,—where, within the compass even of God's own wisdom, and mercy, and power, are the means to be found, or the creed to be had, to effect their conformity with *that* which is *end and aim* of all Crēeds, of all divine legislation, of all that the Father has ever promulgated,—the Son has ever enjoined,—or the blessed Spirit has confirmed in the hearts of devoted

believers,—rectitude to men, piety to God, and purity in the hidden and inward soul!

The world, my Brethren, is said to be becoming, or to have already become, *enlightened*. I would not willingly underrate whatever advances we may have made,—and least of all would despair, or indulge in distrust, for the future. But if ever the Apostolic injunction of "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are before," could be applicable in one case more than another,—well might it be in that which respects the recognized practice and principles of Christendom in all times past,—at least from the Church and State compact of Constantine, up to this present hour,—and that heaped-up debt of reparation to the injured and perverted religion of the Saviour, which remains for the Christendom of future time to discharge,—ere it can reach indeed to "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." For what is the world, the CHRISTIAN world, at this moment,—and most of all in *that* which should be most exempt from the possibility of such reproach,—in its RELIGIOUS relations,—what, I say, is it most intent upon, most devoted to? I say it with grief, I say it with dismay, but say it I must in truth, that in their religious concerns and interests,—their religious passions, prejudices, and prepossessions,—men are engaged, actively, zealously, *increasingly* engaged in defeating justice, destroying mercy, and defaming God.

I know the pleas that could be put in for national mercies that have been done: I know of the records that remain of many mighty strivings, many noble doings, many even Christian victories which have been won:—but I know, too, that even in darkest

times, some generous light has shone,—that even from dreariest times have descended to us some of the most precious muniments of personal and national privilege,—and, finally, that in all times the energy of Christian truth,—that energy which snaps, in happy moments, the cords of harshest creeds, or strongest foes,—can win results which harmonize but ill with the general spirit, and seem to belong to better times, and to forestall remoter triumphs. And thus I judge of the position in which a no small fraction of Christendom at this present moment stands. Let us seek some facts. Alas! we have not far to travel.

At the moment I speak,—this country professing, —(Oh, it *professes* a great deal!) professing to be the freest in Europe, has not yet recovered from the shock of one of the most unparalleled and reprehensible combinations that ever was formed, even in the prosecution of so-called Christian doings, against a project the most just, the most enlightened, the most needed,—in a word,—the least obnoxious to any reasonable objection or exception, that ever was framed within the compass at least of British legislation, for the benefit of an injured, degraded, and ignorant population. And the *motive* to this unparalleled combination was said to be, RELIGION! That is to say, in the impartial provision, (or nearly impartial,—for whatever *preponderance* there was,—and some there undoubtedly existed,—was a preponderance in favour of the principal objectors,)—in this impartial provision for the religious education of the young, and chiefly the teachers of the young, according to the creed, and in such versions of the Scripture as their Parents or Guardians might especially prefer,—it was gravely put forward as matter of apprehension that the pupil of one Creed, reading and instructed wholly

apart, would be prejudiced, injured, endangered, in his religion,—if not altogether bereaved of it,—by the pupil of another Creed being permitted, (for that was the term selected,) being *permitted* to have *his* books, *his* hours, *his* place, and his own separate and chosen teachers to instruct him.

This was the grievance,—*this* the alarm,—and *this* the occasion of that outbreak of JUSTICE! so memorably exemplified in the instance to which,—as the most recent, and, therefore, if upon no other account, the most striking illustration that could have offered itself,—I have here so briefly and transiently alluded, in confirmation of my view. And alluded, let me say, without any apprehension of being chargeable with striking indiscreetly on a subject of politics. Oh, it is NOT a subject of politics!—Or if it be,—it is a sacred politics;—for it is in the interest of humanity, of knowledge, of tolerance, of justice, I have spoken!—and I should have held myself traitor to them all, and, through them, traitor to my God,—if, on so solemn and so public an occasion, almost on the spot of the defeat, and the clamours of the inglorious victory hardly yet subsided, while pleading for the good of my species in the name of that God,—I had faltered in deprecating so much of evil inflicted,—rather I would hope,—so much of evil intended,—in the profession of his cause, and in affected solicitude for his people!

But I must get on. And next I am to show, in terms as rapid and condensed as I can, whether it any better fare with "mercy" than with "justice" in the religious schemes which are put forth as Christianity, and professedly maintained as conducive to that happiness, and harmony, and peace, and love,—in the presence and spread of which, as the surest

of tests, mankind were to recognize the substance or the shadow, the reality or the mockery, of that faith which has Christ for its author, and Heaven for its end. Oh, it is well that men should see how that which commences with wrong to the soul can never but terminate in wrong to the person. Gallios there are, and Festuses and Pilates in spirit around us,—your sceptics and your worldlings,—who look upon all these differences and discussions of opinion, as "questions of our own superstition,"—and whichever side be uppermost or *undermost*,—as not worth a wise man's thought, or a good man's care!

Yet how stands the fact? Why the very people, and the very Creeds which are foremost in erecting and defending the monopolies of earth, have first been securing and maintaining, as is impiously supposed, the monopoly of heaven;—and there can be no more commonly or firmly established sequence than this,—that he who is not good enough to PRAY with,—is not good enough to SHARE with.

Oh, it is awful—would it were enough instructive to minds not yet awakened to the fact! it is awful to reflect how much wrong has been rendered to man by the cruelties which have been ascribed, and the indignities that have been offered, by *systems of faith* to the nature of God. And comparatively rescued, as we are, by the irrepressible good sense and humanity of modern times, which have grown—not in consequence, but in spite, of men's modes of belief, from the wicked and dismal legislation of by-gone days,—a lesson it is of no slight importance to remember *the principle* out of which it grew, and to mark the vitality of that principle, in much that survives of its virulence, in this our free, and liberal, and cultivated, and Christian age.

It has but recently been recalled to the public recol-

lection, by a high legal officer, that it was only so lately as some five-and-twenty years ago, that, in one large section of Britain,* the punishment of *death by law* was abolished,—death by strangulation, death by the felon-rope,—for what? Why, for holding and avowing the simple creed, in the simple words of Scripture, that, "*to us, there is* BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER; *and one Lord, Jesus Christ.*" Now, my only wonder is, not that this law had ever been enacted, but, that it ever was *abolished.* My wonder is, in truth, that there is *any such thing as toleration:* for, entertaining the notion or conviction that men do, that error in opinion,—and, pre-eminently, the error of certain specific opinions,—*must for ever cut us off from the mercy of Almighty God,*—I cannot see why they should be INHUMAN enough to permit such opinions to spread to others; or, so far as they could avert it, even to grow up and strengthen in any single mind whatsoever.

Error, once ascertained, in Rome, by *infallible*, in Britain, by *competent*, authority (for there is that nice distinction of phrases in the case), error once ascertained, and the fatality of error alike ascertained, EXTERMINATION is the only true humanity. And this, consistent persecutors have seen, and acted upon. In the preface to a tract forming portion of a controversy but recently conducted to its close, I find it circuitously, but in effect, declared, that to deny that Jesus is true and perfect God, and, by consequence, to deny his equal title to the designation of "ONLY TRUE GOD,"—with the FATHER, whom yet he himself had declared and prayed to as "the only true God;" thus making two distinct persons or beings, EACH equally "the ONLY true God,"—to deny this, we are told, must be

* In Scotland, by 53 Geo. III. Speech of Attorney-General, (Lady Hewley's Appeal.) House of Lords, 13th May, 1839.

"infallibly fatal," such are the words, to all who are deluded enough to embrace so foul and fearful an error: and accordingly, that not to warn men against it would be, so far from "charity," nothing short of "THE MOST BARBAROUS CRUELTY."* And, undoubtedly, the notable author of this saying is right. But wherefore stop where he does? Wherefore only warn? Suppose the warning to be neglected; suppose the error to spread; *think of the fate of souls*—have you no pity, if not for the obstinate victim himself, at least for the hundreds or thousands who may perish by the bane his art may induce them to taste?—Who would not pull down a house, to stop the devouring flame? Who would not cut off the communication with a wasting plague?

It was thus the persecutor reasoned. And thus it was Bellarmine, who reasoned well, gave expression to the doctrine, which the benevolence of the Church so faithfully and so often reduced to practice:—"Finally," says this champion of the insulted Church, this lover of human souls, this preacher of sweet humanity, this prototype of other champions, other preachers, other lovers,—"finally," says Bellarmine, "it is good for obstinate heretics, that they be put to death; for the longer they live the more errors they invent, the more people they seduce, and the greater damnation they lay up in store for themselves."†

Well, then, I say, if error be so fatal a thing, and if God be so unsparing a God, as Bellarmine and others would declare them to be, THE JESUIT WAS RIGHT, and his imitators are WRONG, in the respective extent to which they would carry their "WARNING." While,

* Liverpool Unitarian Controversy. Preface to Sixth of the Series, pp. 8 and 9; by Rev. Hugh McNeile.

† De Laicis, lib. iii. cap. xxii.

again, if God be the merciful God—the holy God—the righteous God—the WITNESSING God—he is, men should see to it, that they ascribe not to HIM their own poor pitiful passions; and fearing in these days to persecute *to blood*, forbear from exhibiting, *in spirit*, that character of hate which has no place in God; and, if we would be followers of him, ought not, and must not, have place in any *thing* of earth.

Men must be consistent. Either all persecution, or all toleration. If God do not hate, if God would not discard, neither must men, who are to be perfect as he is perfect, merciful as he is merciful. Once you begin in the road to estrangement, you ought, in consistency, to go all lengths. Refusing to go those lengths, you should not take *a first step* in the path of persecution. A commencement in either, naturally conducts to its extreme at the other end.

Now, these are lessons—truisms if you like—which are necessary for the admonition of men's hearts. They are the true "*Tracts for the Times.*" Men are worshiping they know not what: nominally, a God of all love; and, yet, a God so unpitying of human error,—*wherever* that error be, which none but He can infallibly know;—O, they forget this! they never think of *this!*—that they think they do him service—they think they imitate his spirit—in putting away from their hearts, in putting away from their company, stigmatizing as aliens from the hope of God, and consigning to the horror, and, *practically*, to the hate, of all the world, men who inquiringly, conscientiously, devoutly, embrace all they believe Him to have taught—do, or pray to be enabled to do, all they believe Him to have enjoined; and rejoicingly repose in the promises, aids, and hopes of him, who, *but for them*, would be a *common* Saviour.—Yea,

a Saviour, *triumphant and glorified*, in the mutually-strengthened purpose of his united people to do justice, to love mercy, and walk in faithfulness, walk in humbleness, before their Father which is in heaven!

Yes! men ARE worshiping they know not what. The wrongs of men are clamouring for justice—the miseries of men are clamouring for mercy—the nations from afar are calling to us for the knowledge of God—the people at our doors are languishing or thirsting for that which we might give them—and all this, while CHRISTIANS are embroiling or amusing themselves in ascertaining, *not* with how many, but how FEW, fellow-worshipers and fellow-doers they can carry on in their own hearts and their own homes, and shew forth, for the serving and saving of many people, that love of Christ which worketh justice, mercy, and holy worship, in the world!

Words that were sent from the very throne of heaven, to draw the souls of men in common worship thither, are scattered on the thousand winds of discord, to find a solitary or divided home in hearts that do not, and WILL not, know the mind of love with which they were taught to man. There are said to be ninety-seven sects, or modes of Christian faith, in Britain only; and, of all these ninety-seven, I know not what proportion might be named, which should furnish that single being willing, in fullness and freeness of spirit, to kneel down with any one of you, and say the Lord's prayer.

Of that leading denomination of all—the enthroned in high places—the favoured of the state,—which, in imparting its own *exclusive tone*, has imprinted THE LIKENESS OF ITSELF on the many forms which have issued from its womb, now

> ——————"into the womb
> That bred them."

desiring to "return," and make "repast" of her who gave them being; the fact is curious, that three-fourths of its morning and evening services, inclusive of the beautiful collects,* are such as might meet with willing utterance from heart and lip of all here: and yet, of all the controversial crowds who throng its temples, how many could be found who would not deem it very CONTAMINATION to join in that utterance in public, or in private, with any one of Christ's "little ones" here!—Oh yes,—they will pray *for* you, pray *at* you, but not *with* you!—An object of pity—a target of scorn,—you are a thing to be looked at—pointed at—wondered at;† but though with all holiness of soul—with all fervour of belief—with all of mind, and heart, and strength, that ever gave wings to mortal prayer,—you put up to heaven the supplications, for instance, with which I this day introduced this discourse,‡—you are with them, no Christian,—with God, no worshiper,—"depart from me,—I know you not!"—is written on your brow,—and each *poor fragment of mortality*, as-

* But, of course, excluding the Litany: a service quite distinct; and taken word for word from the Romish Missal.

† If we may no longer have a *burning*—it is something, at least, to be able to indulge in a flaming—zeal. Next to the torturing and consuming men's bodies,—an ecclesiastical luxury for some time out of date,—the worrying and insulting men's minds, seems to be the expedient most characteristic of the spirit, and most consonant with the practice, of the privileged and unprivileged orthodox; who, now, as of old, for every act or saying more than usually contumelious or ungracious, may resort to the benevolent plea—that it is all so much evidence of their zeal *pro salute animæ*. Yet, truth to say, we have no great relish for such tender attentions; and very much suspect that, under the cloak of even the most solemn supplications for souls, there lurks "the spirit of an indictment"—and the heart of a persecutor.

If ever occasion for such reflection presented itself, assuredly it existed in the instance of that memorable exhibition, on the evening of March 6th, 1839, at Christ Church, in Liverpool,—when the devotions of some two or three thousand infallibles were *wreaked* upon the heads of three present individuals, who had the fortitude to sustain, yet the meekness to forgive, the most virulent outpouring of what Blackstone has termed "*pious cruelty*," which England has probably witnessed since the latest *auto da fé* in Smithfield. A portion of this public and personal address was,—"O blessed Saviour,——*now mercifully look upon these men.*"——But I cannot—I dare not—trust myself to dwell upon it longer. Whether more approaching the sublime or the ridiculous,—verily the weakness of fatuity, or the force of mortal presumption, could no further go!

‡ Communion Collect; and the Lord's Prayer.

suming to be *a God* to you, *anticipates*, so far as it *may*, the judgment of heaven, by driving you from its presence, by scowling at you in public, avoiding you in private, and by giving you, among men, as much of discredit, as much of discomfort, as may consist, at least, with the law of the land—if not with *that* law, the observance of which is better than whole burnt-offerings,—better than all mystery, all knowledge, and all faith.

So truly did I say, that in its wrong to man, the inculcation of such thinking and doing as this, was alike defamatory of God. But I have, more than usually, trespassed on your time. What remains must be short. Yet, much as I have said, and more as I could say, on the topics which have hitherto engaged me,—defective, indeed, would be my work,—did I part with you without some words of exhortation, some words of encouragement and support.

I have heard of it being said, that all the contrivances and dependencies of the venerated constitution of our country—her courts, her pageants, her parliaments, her laws, her revenues, even her fleets and armies—are but so many means and securities elaborated and devised for the shutting up twelve honest men in a jury-box. And verily, with a like beneficent instrumentality, we may say that all God's methods and ordinances in the training and teaching of man,—whether through outward and inward nature,—whether through early and later revelation,—have been conceived with *the plain and simple object* of bringing men "*to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with Him*" on earth,—so that we may dwell in happiness and holiness with him in the ever-lasting mansions of his kingdom and home in heaven.

Whatever then, in either of these great respects,—

whether as touching you in your quality of citizens of an earthly or a heavenly country,—whatever contributes by a plain necessity or expediency to the end proposed,—*that* value as your liberty,—value as your life. As free and reasonable beings, we are willing, *on this issue*, to place the maintenance of whatever shall come to us with the high and holy claims of government and religion. But, as free and reasonable, we cannot be contented with less. If any such connexion between the means and the end exist, let it not be enough to affirm it,—let it be shown. HERE our business is with religion. Now there are systems and Churches which affect much minute knowledge, profess an unshrinking and fervid faith, and demand, in no very humble tone, implicit adhesion,—in matters of most deep and complicated, and apparently not only of *irrelevant*, but of absolutely *contradictory* character. —These we ask for a reason of their faith,—or we venture by reasons to establish our own;—when lo! we are forthwith met on the threshhold with *reasons* why we should not *reason* at all! Here we are told that Nature instructs us,—or at least comprises such proofs as can be got at,—with respect to *foundation truths* ON WHICH all others are to be firmly and coherently built: while again, we are told that *Nature knows nothing whatever about the matter*,—and that no error can be more pestilent or perilous than to affirm that she does. I am speaking of fact:*—and fortunate it

* For example; at p. 66, of the Liverpool Church Lectures, we learn from Dr. Tattershall, compared with his associated brethren, a temperate and sensible writer,—that "assuredly there do exist in the works of Nature and of Providence, those obvious marks of design, and that design harmonious, wise, and benevolent, which, to a mind *duly* contemplating them, would not fail to convey the assurance of a CREATOR: a Creator, ONE, ALONE, AND UNRIVALLED,—a Creator of infinite power, wisdom, and GOODNESS,"—&c., &c.—This is pretty plain. But lo! on turning to p. 375 of the Series, what do we *there* learn?—why this: as announced by the Rev. David James, (whose name I certainly would do what little I can to perpetuate,)—"*That neither the moral qualities of the Supreme Being, nor his unity, can be discovered by reason from the works of Creation*"!

is that a series of papers which have lately come forth to the world are given in such form, by being *consecutively paged*, that each being answerable for the rest,—the contradictions and inconsistencies comprised in them so efficiently refute each other;—and leave to any disputant who has leisure or taste, the not very difficult task of answering their argumentations, by showing how abundantly they have answered themselves.

Assuredly by no definitions of "JUSTICE" which they have attempted,—have they shown that their popular doctrine is rooted in that attribute. While as little, by any expositions of the "MERCY" residing in the Divine Nature, of which they have presented us the view,—have they succeeded in establishing such notions of *that* quality,—as Nature or Scripture, God or Man,—can ever recognize as having any relation to that pure and heavenly emanation. It is NOT "*justice*"—it is NOT "*the foundation of all equitable Government*,"—as they aver, to insist in all cases on the extreme visitation of the Law. Often the extreme of RIGHT,—as Jurists well know,—were the very last extremity of WRONG.* It is NOT any failure in "*the perfection of truth*," as they would contend,† to bring mercy to the mitigation of law,—when the infringer of the law is no longer guilty in heart,—no longer rebellious in affection. Mercy *means*, and can *only* mean, forgiveness in consideration of the changed affections of the offender! And even if it *could* mean what *they* mean, "a failure of veracity," when it forgives,—why their own theory itself *does not free it from the charge:* the words of the Law—"the Soul that sinneth, it shall die,"—being

* *Summum Jus,—Summa Injuria.*

† Vide the *Rev. Hugh McNeile's* Ethico-metaphysical Exposition, pp. 312, 13, of Liverpool Controversy.

absoutely reversed, and CONTRARY TO THE FACT,—by WHATEVER circuity of device this penalty of the law shall be found to fall short of the head of the actual offender himself. Lastly, my friends,—it is not piety, it is not worship, it is NOTHING that has name, or reality, or similitude, in heaven above or earth beneath,—to fix our minds, or attempt to fix them, in thought or prayer, on a Being whom they *call* indeed *One*,—yet divide at their pleasure into INFINITE PARTS! In all this Universe there can be but One intelligent infinite. *One such Infinite*, by the very necessity of the idea, excludes every other infinity but itself. God CANNOT consist of three Infinites:—and more especially, if possible, with the further and compound contradiction of Infinites each only part of a whole,—and therefore defective of a proportion of that FULNESS of power and wisdom, and goodness, essential to our conception of such a Being as God.

No, no, dear Brethren,—so long as such untenable ethics,—so long as such abused metaphysics,—are permitted to have sway,—there can be no pure morals, there can be no sound faith, there can be efficient piety upon earth. As his Deity is,—so will be the man:—at least this is the tendency,—this the danger;—and such, indeed,—to so large an extent,—the realized result, as we find it to be in the world. Oh, how much, indeed, of love,—how much of good,—how much of the highest and purest emanations from God's eternal sanctities are wanting for earth,—which, alas! is not in *the theology of the times* to give or promise!

On YOU then, Brethren,—and thus I end my unusally, perhaps my unjustifiably, lengthened address,—on YOU, my friends, I would say, a great,—AN AWFUL,—duty

devolves. God,—I have said,—in all ages has sent forth his teachers to the world, I believe he is sending forth you: and by the precious deposit of his truth is calling you,—in Christ's stead, as workers with him, though absent,—as workers through him, though ascended,—nay, because he *is* ascended,—*is* glorified, and gone to prepare a place for his suffering, a place for his faithful,—I believe He is thus calling YOU to be a light to lighten his people, and a beacon to guide them, it may be, through trial,—it WILL be, through triumph,—to truth, to happiness, to heaven.

Yes, Brethren,—with you, I believe, is the ark of God's Covenant. Bear it up above the mists and clouds by which its brightness would be obscured, its beauty would be tarnished. If suffering must needs come,—remember the Disciple is not greater than his Lord, and be not afraid,—especially be not ashamed, —Oh! be not ASHAMED to confess him before men. Yet be of hope for the future. The more to be valued the sacred deposit you bear for its strong voice of truth and nature,—for its yet unfolded power as an instrument of justice, mercy, and piety, upon earth,—the more you should rely on the help of Him who is alike the founder of the Gospel, and of all other truth. Accidental or anomalous combinations,—combinations of policy or of power,—as they *have* done in other periods, —and *still* are doing in other regions,—may for a time infuse a preternatural vigour into the most feeble and puerile semblances of truth. Yet only for a time; for now, as ever, that process of "*experience which destroys the figments of opinion.—as surely confirms the decisions of nature.*"*

Yes!—my hearers—ascendancy may dignify, or

* Opinionum commenta delet dies; naturæ judicia confirmat.—CIC.

wealth may gild, or courts may honour, or crowds may worship, or power may prop, the time-rooted errors we oppose,—but you have THAT which is EARLIER than time,—THAT which is RICHER than wealth,—which is GREATER than dignities,—which is STRONGER than crowds,—which is MIGHTIER than thrones,—you have the eternal verity, that GOD IS ONE,—and, without infringement of that unshared transcendancy, the Gospel verity, that Christ is one with Him;—yea,—and more precious than worlds,—that truth of Christ BESIDES!—that, by faithfulness to him,—by watchfulness of heart, by constancy in prayer, by reading of his word, by baptism in his spirit,—YOU, even you, are *one with him*, as *he* with *God*,—nay, you are one with BOTH!—with Christ and God together!—never, never to be separated by any will of man, by any pains of life, by any pangs of death, by any force or ill of earth.

Oh then, dear brethren, *be* faithful to Him who hath called you;—who is calling you now:—give DILIGENCE to make your calling and election sure;—give your time, your mind, your wealth, your PRAYER,—your all,—to that cause, the cause of your people and body,—which, I verily believe, has God for its author, happiness for its end, and truth, with less mixture of error,—for, still, where man has agency, error *will* be,—truth, we say, with *less* of man's error—for its matter,—than all that God has yet given, or earth has yet seen.

And, now, my brethren,—to the Lord God of truth,—through Jesus Christ,—I commend you for time and for eternity. Amen.

G. Smallfield, Printer, 69, Newgate-street, London.

THE ESSENTIAL UNION OF CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY AND CHARITY:

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN ESSEX STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

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A SERMON.

EPHESIANS iv. 15.—"SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE."

THE claims of Truth and those of Charity are often represented as at variance. Different men, according to their different habits of thought and feeling, seize upon one or other of the obligations which each severally involves, and, taking for granted most unwarrantably that one or the other must be sacrificed, violate in reality the demands of both, while they fancy themselves consistent in acknowledging that obligation which seems to them of paramount importance.

Thus there are many persons who put themselves always prominently forward as the champions of *truth*. They think that the particular opinions or principles which they include under that general term are always to be forced upon the attention, and, if possible, upon the reception, of those with whom they have intercourse; they even make the reception of them the condition of general acquaintance and of benevolent co-operation; they thus by degrees contract the range of their social interests, seclude themselves from those who

entertain different opinions, and as a consequence incur the guilt, not only of many *specific* breaches of Christian charity, but farther, of that constant, that wide-spreading and irreparable breach of it, which the very fact of a merely sectarian intercourse being voluntarily chosen and maintained, continually involves. A man of this class is generally so thoroughly persuaded of the truth of his own opinions and of their supreme importance, that he will not make the smallest allowance for any probable admixture of error in what he deems truth himself, or of truth in what he opposes as error in others: neither, again, will he permit himself for a moment to reflect whether the many, and perchance the most immediately practical, views in which he agrees with others, may not afford a solid and extensive basis of union and co-operation with them, which his comparatively abstracted and infrequent differences need not endanger, still less destroy. Now a person who cherishes this temper and habit of mind is in the greatest danger of proving himself, ere long, no less a foe to the truth which he espouses, than to the charity which he repudiates: for, unless it may be assumed that all important truth is comprised in a few dogmatical propositions, unless it may be still farther assumed that even these propositions may be so clearly and accurately and completely laid down as to preclude the possibility of error in the enunciation and in the reception of them, it is very evident that what was originally true and useful to the mind that *freely* confessed it, may become, when exclusively cherished, a bar to mental and spiritual progress, and thus a hindrance to the attainment of those purer and more extended views

of truth which, by the friendly collisions of opinion, the humble follower of the Truth, in the exercise of the spirit of Christian Charity, is permitted continually to discover.

Other men, on the contrary, make a boast of their unbounded *liberality*, talk largely of the unavoidable diversities of human opinion, and the universal admixture of error, in some degree or other, with even the purest human conceptions of truth. They treat all varieties of opinion as mere idle, or at the best harmless speculations, as though all were equally important or equally worthless, for none of which, consequently, would a truly wise man ever feel called upon to make the smallest exertion or endure the most trifling inconvenience,—none of which he would ever own himself under the obligation of personal conviction to avow and maintain, or under the same obligation to repudiate and oppose. By these false professors of Charity, Truth is looked upon as absolutely and entirely unattainable by man, or at least of so uncertain attainment that the pursuit and avowal of it can never be reckoned among his primary duties ; and hence their Charity, in this connexion, proves at last to be but another name for indifference ; it implies none of those valuable qualities of mind and heart which genuine Charity comprehends. A cold and indolent scepticism confounds truth and error, ay, sometimes virtue and vice also, in one indiscriminate neglect ; and depriving the judgment of all steady principle and the soul of all elevated motive, leaves both a prey to the follies of caprice or the violence of passion, until experience itself shall have taught them that truth and error, virtue and vice, involve the

most important and lasting distinctions, by a regard to which the conduct of life should be determined.

The extremes of bigotry and of indifference which I have endeavoured thus briefly to describe, are often to be seen assuming to themselves respectively the characters of integrity and of charity, and each in turn repelling to its opposite those who are at heart too benevolent to judge others, or too scrupulously conscientious to conceal or renounce the convictions which they entertain themselves. Society at the present day is in fact very much divided by these opposing influences; and hence it becomes a primary duty of the faithful Christian to endeavour to ascertain for himself whether it be not indeed possible for him to avoid either extreme and either illusion; whether, in a word, he may not so combine Integrity with Charity as to maintain both in beneficial union with each other. And surely no intelligent Christian can doubt the possibility of this union, when he remembers that even his divine Master came into the world to "bear witness unto the truth," yet at the same time was not less distinguished for his devoted and persevering and comprehensive benevolence, than he was for his fearless and consistent avowal of that truth which he had been commissioned to proclaim. In like manner do his apostles continually urge this union of consistency with benevolence on their fellow-disciples; exhorting them to "hold fast the profession of their faith," yet at the same time to "do all things in charity;" and, in the words of my text, to "speak the truth (or rather, to *maintain* the truth) in love."

Thus we find that Integrity and Charity (which are so commonly regarded as not strictly reconcilable with

each other, and of which the actual claims of one are so often sacrificed to the supposed claims of the other,) have been in fact united by our great Master, and should be always exercised in union by his enlightened and faithful disciples. To trace out the existence of this union in the very nature of the qualities themselves, whenever they are genuine,—to suggest such views of its importance and of the manner in which it should be maintained as may tend to promote it,—to establish the rule of life by which its blessings may be secured and enjoyed, is my design in the following remarks.

We are, first, to trace out and assure ourselves of the fact, that *genuine Integrity and genuine Charity are naturally and essentially inseparable from each other.*

This fact is discoverable in a consideration of the very nature of Truth. Integrity requires of us the honest avowal and consistent maintenance of our convictions of truth, and such Integrity is, when genuine and enlightened, inseparable from Charity.

For, what *is* Truth? It is *the accordance of knowledge or opinion with fact*:—perfect and absolute, therefore, as it exists in the mind of the omniscient God, and of Him alone; relative and very imperfect as it exists in the mind of any created being whatever. We are concerned with Truth, at this time, only in this latter character,—as an object of *human* attainment.

If we reflect but for a single moment on the infinite range of inquiry and research which the works and providence of Almighty God everywhere open before us, —if we think within how narrow a sphere our powers of observation and knowledge are confined, and how

inconceivably vast must always be the disproportion between our actual attainments and the attainments which may be possible to higher and purer intelligences, we must be disposed to form a very low, perhaps the lowest imaginable, estimate of our discoveries of truth: we shall feel that the extension of our discoveries does but reveal to us more clearly the depths of our ignorance; and under this conviction, when we have obtained it, we shall discern that the highest wisdom of man consists in reverential and humble piety towards God.

But, not to dwell any longer on considerations which should always repress the suggestions of pride, let us proceed to remark that small and comparatively insignificant as are the highest attainments in knowledge which we can make, they are yet adequate to our necessities, and are of the utmost value to us as creatures endowed with intellectual powers, and dependent (under Divine Providence) on the proper use of those powers for the best blessings which we enjoy. Nay, we may advance a step farther, and observe, that, in consequence of that wonderful *unity* of design which everywhere characterizes the infinitely varied operations of the one Almighty and All-wise Creator of the universe, every extension of our discoveries of truth brings with it new and unexpected confirmations of those which we have already made, exhibits in a clearer light their relations and dependencies, and suggests new and useful applications of them which might never otherwise have presented themselves to the mind. Thus the relation which every new discovery of truth bears to previous discoveries, gives to the new truth a value additional

to what it has of itself, and great in proportion to the extent and importance of the relations which it sustains.

These considerations, then, clearly prove to us, that however insignificant our most extended discoveries of truth may be in comparison with what remains to be discovered, they are unspeakably valuable to ourselves; and farther, that every new discovery is also valuable, because, though it may be insignificant of itself, even in comparison with our previous discoveries, it is impossible to say but that the influences which it may exert upon them may prove very numerous and extended. Thus the value of abstract truth in its character of *the Truth*, is firmly established.

Let me now invite your attention to the other element which is implied in our definition of Truth. Its existence is so obvious and so obviously necessary that I should not think of mentioning it, did not frequent observation convince me that it is very generally overlooked.

Truth, I have defined as being the accordance of knowledge or opinion with fact. Knowledge and opinion necessarily imply *a mind* that knows and thinks. In their perfect accordance with fact, their existence implies (as we have already observed) the existence of an infinite and perfect mind, the existence of God, to whom we assign the perfection of knowledge as an essential attribute of His nature. We know that this absolute and perfect Truth must exist in Him; we know that it can exist in no other being whatever. And in the subordinate sense in which we speak of Truth as attainable by man, it is surely no less evident

that the fact of its existence implies the existence of a mind that has attained and possesses it. Thus, whether we refer to the existence of Truth in its perfection with God or in its imperfection with man, we necessarily and unavoidably imply the existence of a *mind*, infinite or finite, of which it is the property; we see that it is impossible for it to exist independently of some *mind*. Now in what mind does it really exist? In the mind of God? Undoubtedly: but as existing there, infinitely above the reach of human attainment. In the mind of man? Undoubtedly: but as existing there, the property of the *individual* mind in which it exists, and of no other mind whatever. And since every rational man is formed capable of attaining knowledge and entertaining opinions *for himself alone*, and can possess them in no other way, it is clear that, to every man, Truth, considered as an object of human attainment, is the distinctive name for that portion of his knowledge which he believes to be accordant with fact, —that as such, it is the result of his own individual convictions, and exists for *him*, only as in his own mind he contemplates and maintains it. Thus with every man, *Truth is a personal possession*; as much so as individual consciousness, as much so as the individual sense of responsibility, and the fear, or hope, or sorrow, or joy by which it may be attended. We often speak of all these states of mind in the abstract; but we know that they can exist in reality, only as some mind or other actually experiences them. And so also of Truth. We speak of this too in the abstract. But the considerations which I have advanced will, I trust, have been sufficient to prove that the correct knowledge

which it designates, whatever be its nature or extent, must be the property of some mind which knows, and can have no existence whatever except as it is the object of contemplation to the individual mind which possesses it.

Hence Truth, considered as the property of an individual mind, is but another name for *individual conviction*. The conviction of *one* mind, in reference to any particular subject, *may* accord generally with the conviction of some other mind, or with the separate convictions of many other minds. It is perfectly natural that there should be this general accordance, because there is, in fact, a general similarity of mental structure and operation observable among our race, notwithstanding the numerous diversities by which individuals are distinguished from each other. And this fact furnishes us with the true and sufficient answer to the timid suggestions of those who apprehend that, were it not for the restraints of human authority, there would be exhibited an injuriously wide diversity of individual principles and practices, in regard to the momentous topics of faith, and duty, and devotion. Such has been the enfeebling and intimidating influence of creeds, and of State-power and patronage, on the heart of many a sincere and humble Christian, that few, very few, comparatively, are to be found who can consistently and habitually exercise that faith in the God of Truth, in the great Author of our intellectual and moral, as well as physical nature, which would enable them to rejoice in an unrestricted freedom of inquiry and profession, in connexion with the important subjects by

which our spiritual welfare is most immediately and powerfully affected.

Such were the fears once entertained respecting the free investigation and avowal of truth in matters of physical science. Where are those fears now? Where are they, at least, among the actual cultivators of physical science, — among the men to whose confiding, patient, persevering, truth-seeking labours, we are indebted for the wondrous advances which are now continually being made in the fairest regions of scientific discovery, in the useful and elegant arts of life? We still hear, indeed, the murmurs of the vulgar crowd occasionally ascending even into the pure empyrean of philosophy, and demanding that the brightness which threatens to expose some long-cherished and carefully-concealed error or superstition shall be veiled from the feeble eyes of prejudice and vanity. But the unhallowed tumult of these slaves of fear disturbs not the calm and elevated contemplations of those lovers of wisdom who have raised themselves to behold the wonders of creative power and goodness: and while they trace the hand of the Divine Artificer, with humble and admiring gratitude, in the minutest structure of the insect and the flower, or stand in awe before those grander exhibitions of His boundless might and skill, which in the starry heavens suggest to us the immeasurable *extent* of God's glorious works, and in the upriven foundations of the earth suggest to us their immeasurable *duration*, they feel themselves in the presence and under the guidance of One, against whose ineffable majesty all the fury of man must rage in vain:

and as they undauntedly pursue their onward path of faithful inquiry and equally faithful confession of its results, they exhibit to every Christian a practical comment on the apostolic rule, a practical illustration of the benefits of a fearless observance of that rule, that "we ought to obey God rather than men."

And what, I ask, have been the results of this noble, this sublime faith, in the great God of nature, in the wisdom and goodness of His works, in the sufficiency of those powers which He has given us for the humble investigation of them? Have the cultivators of science become more and more fearful of the process by which it is cultivated? Have they become more and more estranged from each other by diversities of principle and of the results of its faithful application? Have they begun to apprehend that they shall soon have no principles in common, no ground of mutual fellowship and co-operation, no common instruments of observation and research, whose very imperfections they may appreciate so as to approximate nearer and nearer to the truth? It is almost superfluous to make such inquiries; so notorious is it, that the very opposite results have ensued from free and fearless scientific investigation. Everybody is aware that its principles and rules are becoming every day more and more fixed and determined; not by outward authority, (for science, happily, spurns a State-established creed,) but by inward individual conviction. And it is the glory of our age that it exhibits a striking practical acknowledgment of this general, this fundamental agreement, not only among the cultivators of each separate department of science, but among the cultivators of science

universally, in the existence and agency of that august "Association for the advancement of Science," which can bring no richer offerings to the shrine of Truth, than its very presence constitutes at the shrine of Liberty; where, indeed, it stands, itself "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable," to the God of truth and freedom.

What a lesson does not this fact teach us, my hearers, as to the wise provision which has been made by the gracious Author of our being, for as much *accordance* of conviction among us as is essential to useful co-operation, blended with as much *diversity* as is essential to individual independence. And how have we arrived at this important fact in relation to physical science? By distrusting the use of those instruments which God has provided for the prosecution of it? No: but by using them humbly and carefully, yet confidingly and faithfully. It was not the philosophic Galileo, but the ignorant and bigoted Inquisitor, who refused to see with his own eyes the satellites of Jupiter, because he feared that the discovery of them might endanger the popular creed. What would have been the worth of the accordance of sentiment which that creed was designed to secure, an accordance based on ignorance and enforced by tyranny? Would it have been worthy of being maintained, either for itself or its effects, in comparison with the *real* accordance which has resulted from free and fearless inquiry? It is impossible that any enlightened man can hesitate in his preference. It is impossible that he can either doubt or deny that the general similarity of intellectual and moral, as well as corporeal structure, observable among our race, *must*

lead to a general accordance in the results of free and independent conviction, abundantly sufficient for all the purposes which men can justly contemplate in their union with each other.

But this accordance *cannot* extend to all convictions whatever. Different men must think differently in regard to the same subjects to some extent or other, both because of their original differences of constitution, and of the differences in their individual observation and experience: and hence, that which is truth to one man cannot be always and in all respects truth to another, any more than the impressions and operations through which truth is gained by every individual possessor of it can be in all men precisely the same.

Thus we have two very important considerations firmly established: First, The value of truth *as truth*. Secondly, Its existence only as the property of some mind; and the consequent diversity in its aspects, notwithstanding much general resemblance, in the different minds of those by whom it is severally possessed.

But the identity of Truth, to every individual possessor, with his own individual conviction, brings it into contact, not merely with his intellectual, but also with his moral and spiritual nature. The mind of man was never intended for abstract speculation and inquiry only; it was given him also to be the guide of his life; and the convictions which he obtains by its varied exercises necessarily become that law to his conscience, which he can never violate without injury and remorse. With this view of its character and relations, *the possession of Truth involves*, in the instance of every man, *the moral duty of maintaining it*. No man is at liberty to belie

his convictions on any subject. It is a high moral offence in him to do so; because, by so doing, he corrupts and destroys that *integrity* of mind which is essential to consistency, purity, and independence of principle and behaviour. Let it be our first care, then, my Christian brethren, to hold fast this integrity. We cease to respect ourselves whenever we violate it, because we are conscious of despising the dictates of that spirit within us by which we are exalted in the scale of creation. Nor can we reasonably expect by such violation to increase our social usefulness, since we can exert no influence more beneficial than that of an honest and consistent conduct; nor is there any way of maintaining this conduct except by the maintenance of our own honest convictions as its guide and support.

In every view, therefore, the preservation of our integrity by the consistent maintenance of what we believe to be truth, is our *first* duty; and He who came from God to show us our duty has explicitly enjoined it upon us. Having exhibited himself among men as one who was "sent into the world to bear witness to the truth," he required that his example should be reverenced and followed at any risk and at any sacrifice. Such is the full import of his solemn words, (interpreted by so many professing Christians with a reference to some particular creed, and by so many others without any self-application whatever,)—"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." Nor are any of his awful denunciations more severe than those which were di-

rected against the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees, and those against his unbelieving countrymen in general, who could assign to the agency of demons the very works of power and love which proclaimed, even to their reluctant conviction, that his mission was indeed from God.

Thus the authority of Christ and of his holy gospel concurs with the dictates of reason, in teaching us that every man is in duty bound to maintain his convictions, to maintain the truth with which, in his estimation, they are identical, and that this is a duty of the first importance. It is remarkable that the first place is everywhere assigned to it in the writings of the Apostles. The wisdom from above which they had received and taught, is impressively described by the apostle James as "*first, pure*;" and the apostle Paul emphatically declares, in connexion with what was in his day a great trial of Christian integrity, that "Whatever is not of faith (*i. e.* of conviction) is sin."

Integrity, then, in the avowal and maintenance of truth, is the very foundation of all moral, of all Christian excellence. Let no professor of the religion of Jesus think for a moment that he can erect the superstructure of acceptable piety and love on any other foundation. Let no one imagine that he can really obey the voice of his Master, unless he be "of the truth;" unless, especially, in connexion with the all-important concerns to which the revelation that is by Christ relates, he has faithfully endeavoured to discover the truth, and shown himself always *as* faithful in maintaining it. *This is the first duty of every Christian*; and great indeed is the peril of neglecting or violating it, though, alas! the or-

dinary maxims of worldly policy and the ordinary practices of society are such as encourage this neglect and violation. God forbid, my brethren, that we should be any of us prone to indulge in harsh and censorious judgments of others in this connexion, remembering how liable we are to mistake their real sentiments, and how imperfectly we may have been acquainted with the nature of their convictions; but let us be very rigid in the judgment of ourselves, and very careful to preserve "always a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men," and to "maintain the truth in love."

To "maintain the truth (I repeat with our Apostle,) in *love*;" for thus only can it be consistently maintained. I have dwelt so long on the supreme importance of Integrity, because I have been aware that, in endeavouring to vindicate the claims of Truth on every individual possessor of it, I have no less endeavoured to vindicate, at the same time, the claims of Charity. The obligation to the exercise of Charity results from the obligation to the maintenance of Integrity as a necessary and obvious consequence. There is no real incompatibility or conflict between them. For, surely, if the obligation to the maintenance of Integrity be thus primarily urgent upon *any one* man, it is equally urgent upon *all* men; and therefore he who sees and owns its urgency with reference to himself, must, in all consistency, see and own its urgency with reference to others. Yes! every man has a right, every man is under an obligation, to maintain what he believes to be *truth*; to maintain it in the manner and on the occasions which seem to him fit, but still to maintain it; and as the dis-

charge of this obligation necessarily involves the maintenance, by different persons, of different views, it is self-evident that the diversities of sentiment which it will more or less prominently exhibit, ought never to become a cause of alienation or enmity amongst those who entertain them, but that each should respect the sincerity of every other man, while careful to preserve his own. Thus *genuine Charity and genuine Integrity are naturally and essentially inseparable from each other.*

The practical rule of social conduct which these considerations establish, is simple and easy of application. We have been contemplating the supreme importance of the individual maintenance of conviction, and the necessity for the mutual exercise of charity which the *diversities* of human conviction must involve. We had previously remarked the very general and extensive *accordance* of principles and views which subsists among those who are members of the same social body. Let us take these facts in their connexion, and they supply us with the rule which we seek. They show us that we have a very broad and solid ground of concert and co-operation with our fellow-members of society, on which we may engage together in the exercise of those principles, and in the pursuit of those objects, which we agree in considering to be important. On this region of concord, then, let us never obtrude those differences of sentiment which are foreign to the objects which it comprehends, and to the principles and methods requisite for the attainment of them. Causes of unavoidable separation, sufficiently numerous for the exercise of our spirit of independence and integrity, will still re-

main. If the existence of such causes *only* be recognised, the separation which they will, not unfrequently perhaps, require, will suggest to every one of us the imperfection of his knowledge, without weakening his conviction of the importance of his personal fidelity to the light which he actually possesses. It will exercise at the same time our Integrity and our Charity. We shall be strengthened in our love for the Truth, and in our determination to maintain it, nor less in our love for each other. Rejoicing ourselves in that freedom of mind which results from an uncorrupted faithfulness to our convictions, we shall rejoice to see others also maintaining it. We shall estimate our spiritual union with all such persons as stronger—infinitely stronger—than our speculative disagreement. However our creeds may differ, we shall recognise each other as brethren, and gladly unite, as we have opportunity, in those labours of piety and love in which our common human sympathies invite us to engage. Who can doubt that by the observance of this rule, the claims of Integrity and those of Charity are reconciled, and that righteousness and peace must flourish by the recognition of them? Who can doubt that the triumphs of the Gospel will thus be most effectually extended, and its spirit of truth and love cherished in the hearts of men? At any sacrifice, then, let us maintain the truth ourselves, and respect the maintenance of it in others. We cannot fail to cherish towards them a generous and Christian spirit, when we recognise in *them* the obligation to the assertion of that liberty, in which, as the disciples of Christ, we determine to "stand fast" *ourselves*.

These remarks, and the views which they have been

designed to confirm and illustrate, will not fail, I persuade myself, of obtaining the ready concurrence of all who know experimentally what it is to attain important truth themselves, and who have made it their endeavour, as the disciples of the benevolent Jesus, to "maintain that truth in love." But perhaps their connexion with the immediate purpose of our present assembling may not be so clearly perceived. We are met together at this time in a distinctive character, and for the promotion of what we justly deem a very important object. As Unitarian Christians, we are here united for the express purpose of considering how we may most effectually contribute to the maintenance and diffusion of Unitarian Christianity; not, indeed, as any mere intellectual speculation—(for that would be to degrade it)—but in the spirit and with the power which we believe that it possesses, in common with that Christianity of the New Testament with which, in our estimation, it is identified. Now with such a design, it surely must be obvious, on a moment's consideration, that the great principles which the zealous Apostle of the Gentiles observed and recommended, cannot but have a very intimate connexion. The integrity and love which Paul exhorted his fellow-Christians to maintain for the establishment and diffusion of *their* faith, cannot but prove worthy of our most careful and serious attention whenever we contemplate measures for the establishment and diffusion of what we believe to be *the very same* faith. And accordingly we shall find that the advice of our Apostle in my text has a very important bearing on both our *duties* and our *hopes* as

professors of Unitarian Christianity. Let me suggest,—

First, the bearing which it seems to me to have on our peculiar *duties*.

Every one must, I think, perceive and admit that our Apostle's injunction demands of us individually the faithful and fearless avowal of our religious convictions in all circumstances in which the expression of religious conviction is in any degree necessarily involved. Hence *the formation, by Unitarian Christians, of separate societies for religious worship, appears clearly a duty*; not only because those principles of free inquiry which we profess forbid us to recognise even doctrinal truth itself in the garb of human authority, but also because the worship of our fellow-Christians, of every other denomination, is avowedly offered to one whom we cannot regard as the proper object of worship,—to one, who, we are persuaded, would himself have rejected it with horror, and who has expressly taught his disciples, when they pray, to say, as he himself did, "Our Father who art in heaven." Hence, integrity seems absolutely to demand of every Unitarian Christian that he scrupulously avoid all evasion or compromise in connexion with a subject on which every other Christian society than that of the Unitarians so explicitly and formally announces sentiments to which his own are diametrically opposed.

Not that there is in fact any necessity for the admixture of such speculative views regarding the great Object of worship with the sacred exercises of devotion. It is not only very conceivable, but it is, in truth, highly

desirable, that the disciples of Jesus, however wide their diversities of doctrinal sentiment, should be able to join together, in the spirit of him whom they all call Master and Lord, in their access to that heavenly Father whom Jesus has so clearly revealed as the supreme object of their faith and worship. Questions about essence and personality have no legitimate place in a scriptural or purely spiritual worship, and ought never to be recognised in it among Christians, except to be altogether repudiated. We have no right to impose any speculative or formal restrictions whatever on those who may be willing to join with us as Christians in the worship of Almighty God. Hence, while we renounce the creed-moulded devotions of others, let us be studious not to exhibit a creed in our own. The negative avowal of our distinctive sentiments in our social worship is indeed unavoidable; but let us reserve the positive avowal of them in their distinctive, in their controversial character, for seasons and situations less sacred than those in which we bow before the footstool of the Universal Father, to own our common dependence and obligations, to implore the common blessings, temporal and spiritual, which we need, to confess our common frailties and sins, and to seek, from the inexhaustible riches of divine mercy, the pardon and strength, the guidance and encouragement, which we severally require. When due precautions have been taken to secure us against the direct attack upon our individual convictions, the spirit of party or of controversy should never be permitted to disturb the holy fervour of a sincere and heartfelt devotion.

It is hard to recommend moderation without seem-

ing to repress zeal; and yet the principles which have been advanced in this discourse seem to me to demand of Unitarian Christians, in their corporate capacity, that they do homage to the truth, that they blend integrity and charity in blissful union, by being very careful to restrict their efforts for the recommendation of their sentiments, within the bounds which are prescribed by a delicate respect for the just rights of others. We cannot, therefore, my brethren, it appears to me—we cannot lawfully appropriate to ourselves exclusively, in our character of Unitarian Christians, any means of useful agency, any purpose of social benevolence, in which the recognition of our distinctive views is not immediately and essentially involved. We are thus deprived, no doubt, of many most powerful weapons of controversial warfare. We relinquish many of the most splendid trophies of party triumph, and must be content to stand forth in the undistinguished ordinary garb of men and of Christians, where the zealous advocate of opposing sentiments would parade the colours of his sect, and claim for it the honours of victory. We cannot be insensible to the magnitude of the sacrifice which this principle demands; but we may say, with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, after *his* enumeration of distinctions and advantages which *he* was willing to renounce as inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, though many mistaken zealots of his day urged the maintenance of them, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ:" and we may rejoice, as *he* did, that many an opportunity is granted us of showing forth the spirit and the power of the Gospel, which cannot, without perversion, contri-

bute to the diffusion of those more speculative views in which the truth of the Gospel seems to us to be greatly involved. It cannot, surely, be any occasion of regret or disappointment to a truly *Christian* mind, that *unity of faith* should prove far more attainable and comprehensive than *uniformity of belief*; nor can the Christian heart, however earnestly desirous of the extension of its own fondly-cherished convictions, fail to rejoice in the discovery that piety and benevolence are not the exclusive property of any sect, but that among disciples of every name and of every form of belief, the fear of God, and the law of righteousness, and the work of duty, are honestly and zealously regarded.

Thus, from the very nature of our principles, it seems to me that the efforts of enlightened Unitarians for the promulgation of their distinctive views, must needs be restricted within comparatively narrow limits. *We* cannot claim to ourselves (thank God !) an exclusive salvation ; *we* cannot appropriate to ourselves, for party purposes, any means or opportunities of good in which our Christian brethren of other denominations may reasonably be asked to share. Here is the weakness of our cause, as men estimate weakness, confessed ; but it is a weakness in which, if we rightly estimate it, the power of truth and of God will one day be more signally displayed. If we be but faithful to our principles, maintaining our convictions with the integrity and charity which those principles require, we shall find indeed that we have much to do and much to endure, not merely in consequence of the opposition of those who denounce our heresy, but also in consequence of what is far more difficult to bear, the urgency of some, and the laxity of others, who forget

that neither integrity nor charity must be sacrificed in the maintenance of a truly Christian profession. But though our situation be thus arduous, and our immediate prospect in some respects discouraging—discouraging, however, only in the sight of a merely worldly mind—we have still a solid ground of *hope* in the very nature of our convictions, and of the principles by which they have been attained, on which we may fearlessly rest. This, for our comfort and encouragement, let me endeavour, in conclusion, briefly to exhibit.

It is a just ground of *hope*, as well as of present satisfaction, that the convictions of Unitarian Christians partake of the character of all other enlightened convictions in being strictly rational: not merely obtained, that is, by the exercise of reason in the interpretation of Scripture, but approving themselves to the reason by which they have been thus obtained. They thus take their place in our minds among those other convictions which we regard as of chief importance in the regulation of our dispositions, and in the conduct of life. Religious truth, the truth of the Gospel, is not, in our view, something separated from moral truth, and of an entirely different character. It comes to us, indeed, with the sanction of a far higher authority than it could have derived from our unaided research; but in itself, and in its influences, it harmonizes most wonderfully, most beautifully, with our most successful discoveries, and gives to them all a clearness, an elevation, an efficacy, which they would not by themselves have possessed. Is it conceivable, I would ask, that the minds of men, awakened and excited to a sense of the supreme importance of religious convictions, shall long be satis-

fied with such as bear little or no analogy to the convictions by which they are commonly actuated? Is it to be imagined for a moment that, having been again and again taught the value of Truth in relation to general science, having again and again conducted the processes of investigation by which it is attained, having again and again felt its accordance with previously ascertained truth, having again and again tested its utility by various applications—is it to be imagined that men thus instructed and thus disciplined, will long be content to receive inexpressible and incompatible dogmas in the disguise of alleged mystery? As reasonably might we have supposed, prior to the great revolution of sentiment which we now see taking place around us, and of whose completion we can entertain no doubt, that when the wondrous architecture of the heavens had been disclosed by telescopic observation, and proved the vanity, in a scientific point of view, of those primæval traditions which had for centuries passed current, as the very revealed word of God,—as reasonably might we have supposed that similar traditions could arrest the rapid progress of geological inquiry, and deprive us of those grand intimations of the inconceivable ages over which a single step in the onward march of Providence extends, which the very structure of the globe on which we live reveals to our astonished and awe-struck gaze.

In a word, "the connexion of the sciences" cannot break off at the end of those only which are physical. Philosophers of the greatest eminence, in our own and in former days, have again and again demonstrated the relation of the material world to the mind and soul of

man ; have proved that God is therefore the governor of the moral as well as of the physical universe ; and that He has encircled, by one and the same glorious chain of causation, the atmosphere which is essential to vitality, and the conscience which is to every man the oracle of God*. It must, therefore, come to pass, under the guidance of Infinite Wisdom, that the same principles of investigation shall be recognised in the search for religious and moral, as for scientific truth, and the same harmony required in its results. Whenever this period arrives, we shall no longer see *Mysteries whose very existence requires to be proved*, confounded with those whose existence is unquestionable, but *whose nature requires to be explained.* We shall no longer see *Reason*, which is *the only living agent* of inquiry, opposed to *Revelation*, which is one of the most valuable aids and encouragements to the most important exercise of its agency†. We shall no longer see individual research restricted by external tyranny, nor the mind that has burst the fetters of a merely traditional philosophy of outward nature, assisting to rivet on itself those more

* This great truth is admirably elicited and illustrated by Professor Whewell in the third of the Bridgewater Treatises (Book III. chap. i.) ; a work which needs not any recommendation from me, but of which I cannot refrain from remarking that it is equally worthy the attention of the philosopher and the Christian.

† I know no work which can contribute more effectually to dissipate the confusion of the popular ideas on these important subjects than that of the Rev. Joseph Blanco White, entitled, " Observations on Heresy and Orthodoxy," of which it is encouraging to know that a *second* edition has recently been demanded and published. It is destined, I will venture to predict, for a far wider circulation at no very distant day.

enslaving fetters which the traditional superstitions of a corrupted and secularized Christianity would assuredly impose. The knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation will take its just rank among the stores of our intellectual, as well as spiritual wealth, and be seen to augment the value of all other kinds of knowledge. "The kingdoms of this world" will become, in every sense, "the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." O may His kingdom come!

There is yet another entirely independent and equally solid ground of cheerful *hope* which demands our thankful consideration. Forming and estimating our religious convictions in the same manner as we form and estimate any other convictions which we entertain, it is our privilege, as Unitarian Christians, consistently to enjoy the satisfactions of genuine Christian charity. We can not only wish well to all, but we can hope well and believe well of all, however differing from us in their speculative views, who show by their conduct that they are the servants of God, and that they call on our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It is the tendency of our faith to throw down barriers, not to erect them. We are content with maintaining our own freedom; we claim no commission (we desire none) to war against and denounce the equal freedom of others.

Now it is, in many respects,—not in all, but in many,—an encouraging characteristic of these times, that men are prone to various *association* with one another, and that the almost infinite diversity of the objects with a view to which they associate, necessarily forces them out of their narrow party seclusion, and compels them to feel and act with their brethren of

different, and even opposite, parties. The very force and stringency of many of the methods which are now being adopted,—in the revival of antiquated creeds and assumptions which were till lately fast hastening into the oblivion for which they are soon destined,—the very force and stringency of these methods for restraining the spirit of liberality, is an attestation of this humanizing and Christian tendency, a measure of the expansive power of the spirit of freedom, an earnest of its resistless triumphs, which should animate us to cherish and illustrate it under every trial of our faith and patience. Will the dispensation of Providence, by which He thus practically exhibits to us His universal paternity and our universal brotherhood as his rational children, teach no lesson of Charity? Will it never open to kindred emotions the heart that might otherwise have been encased in bigotry? Will it never confound the petty distinctions of sectarianism, and cast to the earth its haughty assumptions, by making it confess that the practical influences of Christianity extend far beyond the limited pale of its own recognised communion? It *must* have these tendencies. It *must* bring men together, first as men and afterwards as Christians, notwithstanding diversities of doctrinal sentiment, when it has stamped on the minds of men of various parties a conviction that their actuating principles and desires, their sympathies and hopes, are really the same, and when it has compelled them to the mutual recognition of each other's virtues so explicitly, that they can never again indulge in unfounded mutual recriminations. Will not such a result, I ask, when thus attained, or when thus in process of attainment, will

it not check and ultimately annihilate the spirit of party exclusion? Will it not produce a reverence for honest individual conviction, and sympathy with those who cherish it? Will it not tend to raise such conviction to its just importance, and with it all the elements of reason, of investigation, of argument, out of which it must have been wrought? Surely we have in these considerations, my Unitarian brethren, the most encouraging promise that the doctrines which we individually embrace as rational, and consistent, and liberal as well as scriptural, must needs extend, if we do but ourselves uphold them in the combined exercise of Integrity and Charity.

There are many signs of the times which prove that, to this crisis, the minds of men are surely, however slowly, advancing. The antagonist forces of spiritual tyranny and of Christian freedom are visibly arraying themselves under their respective banners, and preparing for a more vigorous, a more decisive conflict than any in which they have hitherto engaged. Shall the friends of freedom despair of its issue? Shall they who glory, who rejoice in the reasonableness, in the consistency, in the practical efficiency of their Christian faith, quail before the menaces of ecclesiastical pride and power? Yes! let them despair, let them quail, let their faithless hearts dissolve with fear, if, when the noble fight of spiritual freedom is to be fought, they can be allured from the avowal and maintenance of their religious convictions by the glittering baubles of wealth and fashion, or terrified by the frowns of hostile tyranny. But not thus shall it be with the humble followers of *him* who came to "bear witness to the

truth." Keeping steadily before them the example of their great Master, they will not be afraid with any amazement, nor overcome by any temptation, which He, who knoweth their frame, ordains that they should endure. Happy in the consciousness of an unswerving integrity, happy in the intercourses and services of a genuine charity, happy in the felt presence of the God of truth and love, they shall hail, and swell, and share the triumphs of righteousness and peace. They shall prove in their own blessed experience, and shall most effectually recommend to the convictions of others, that a rational and enlightened Christian faith, consistently upheld, fearlessly avowed, and exhibiting its divinest influences in love unfeigned, is "the power of God unto salvation." The elements of this faith, my brethren, we claim as in some measure peculiarly our own. Let us show ourselves worthy of the trust committed to us in the possession of them.

THE END.

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THE POSITION, DANGERS AND DUTIES OF UNITARIANS CONSIDERED.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE NEW GRAVEL-PIT MEETING, HACKNEY,

ON THURSDAY, JUNE 3RD, 1841,

BEING

THE SIXTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

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TO THE MEMORY OF

THE LATE

JOHN TALBOT

OF LEEDS,

THE FRIEND AND NOT INEFFICIENT ADVOCATE OF

CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY,

THE CONSCIENTIOUS SEARCHER AFTER TRUTH,

THE HUMBLE-MINDED YET FEARLESSLY UPRIGHT CHRISTIAN,

AND IN WHOM WERE BEAUTIFULLY BLENDED

THE INSTRUCTOR, COMPANION AND FATHER,

THIS DISCOURSE

IS DEDICATED,

WITH REVERENTIAL AND AFFECTIONATE GRATITUDE,

BY HIS SON

EDWARD TALBOT.

A SERMON.

John vi. 68.

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

Whether as Christians we be invited to follow those who deny that the prophet of Nazareth was a teacher sent from God,—or as Unitarians to give our assent to opinions which, though preached in the name of Christ, seem to us at variance with his doctrine,—we would say with Peter, when Jesus asked the twelve, Will ye also go away? "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We would follow Christ before all others, not because he was the wisest and best man that ever lived, but because whilst he was this he was more than this—an attested ambassador to bear unto us the will of the Most High.

When we consider the influence that Christianity has already produced on the social and moral state of the world, what it is now effecting, and the blessings which without prophetic vision, we may from this source surely anticipate, we are compelled in the calm and sober exercise of our reason to conclude, that an agency mightier than human power or genius was concerned in the production of results so wonderful.

Then, when we examine the writings which bear the name of Christ's personal followers, their language and

internal evidence show that they must have been written very near the times in which the recorded events are placed—so near that they could not have obtained the extensive and lasting credence, which they did obtain, if they had been but cunningly-devised fables. This conclusion is confirmed by historical evidence.

And as we peruse the documents themselves, we feel that realities, not fictions, are before us :—whilst we read and meditate, the character of Christ gradually reveals itself in its majesty and beauty ; it commands our reverence, wins our hearts, and strengthens our faith. We acknowledge it as a ray of the Divine brightness. This surely is such a teacher as God would send !

Nor are the miracles of Christ to us matters of difficulty or unbelief. No man indeed could have done those things which he did unless God had been with him ; but we cannot doubt the presence of God with Christ ; and in these works of more than human power, we behold the Almighty and the all-wise confirming the gracious and gladdening promises of a Father's love.

The teachings of Jesus too are suitable to the wants of man ;—they meet his longing for immortality, and answer with authority the question, If a man die shall he live again ? Death, that great and mysterious change, is to the Christian but the mode of transit to a nobler life. Jesus has also made known the paternal character of God :—His pardon to the sinner, (and we are all sinners,) on repentance.—He enforced the doctrine of the brotherhood of man ; and showed the needfulness of self-government, and inward purity to peace on earth, and bliss in heaven. These are the principles that must continue to regulate our moral and intellectual advancement :—never

will even the most gifted be able to say, I need not this knowledge, and I am superior to these duties. Like the globe on which he dwells, man may change, and always for the better, but it must be by revolving in that orbit of duty which the Eternal One has appointed for him.

Christianity, in spite of all opposing influences, has been productive of blessings beyond our means adequately to estimate. Its pervading power has been felt by Catholic and Protestant, by sceptic and unbeliever. It has blessed, like the diffused light of the sun on a cloudy day; corruptions, worldly-mindedness and unbelief, though they have obscured, could not wholly intercept the rays, and multitudes have been enlightened and cheered by that moral luminary which they could not distinctly behold. Still the most precious influences of the Gospel, the light and warmth of its unclouded ray, are reserved for those who, having received it in a humble and teachable spirit, are grateful, not only for the tidings communicated, but also for those proofs and sanctions of Divine power which stamp the message of Christ with the authority of God.

Assuming that a Divine revelation will, other things being equal, prove a blessing, in proportion as its import is more or less clearly understood, it must be the first duty of a Christian to endeavour to ascertain the meaning of the heavenly message.

Whence shall we obtain this knowledge if not from the records which have been left us by Christ's immediate followers,—availing ourselves of every means within our reach for the right understanding of documents written in a far distant age, and containing allusions to customs, and modes of thought very different from our own?

But the sufficiency of Scripture interpreted by private

judgment, and investigation, having been not only controverted, but practically repudiated even by the majority of those who contend that the Bible is the religion of Protestants, a few words in defence of this principle become necessary.

It is admitted by Protestants, and not, that I am aware of, formally denied by Catholics, that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation." This being granted, one would suppose that the sincere inquirer could fall into no fatal error. Yet what says the Roman Catholic? If your private interpretation agreeth with the Church, it is well; if not, it is heretical and dangerous. The Church of England claims a like authority. Her articles and creeds furnish the scriptural investigator with ready-made inferences, to be received on pain of perishing everlastingly. The orthodox Dissenter also shuts out from the Christian name, and hope, all who admit not the doctrines which he declares to be essential. Hence it becomes our duty to ask, Who hath given authority to the Church of Rome, to the Church of England, or to the Dissenter, to pass sentence of spiritual outlawry against any that receive the Scriptures as their rule of faith? If there be such authority, what are its credentials? Are there many such infallible interpreters, or only one—and if but one, where are we to look for it? If such authority exist at all, it must be single; two or more infallible interpreters must arrive at the same result, and their interpretation therefore be but one.

We may at once set aside the authority of the orthodox Dissenter, for he cannot consistently claim the right to judge for himself, and at the same time condemn the conclusion of another. He may assume indeed that he is

holier, wiser, better than the brother who differs from him; but this will not make him so, or prove that the views which he holds are nearer the standard of Scripture.

Can the Church of England, then, make out a valid claim to exercise authority in controversies of faith? It has been said,* "We of the Church of England, while we defer to Scripture only, profess to receive Scripture

* Vide "Call to Union," by Dr. Hook, Note H, p. 79, fourth edition. Rivingtons.—"Of a truth, the Socinian, or 'Unitarian,' as he denominates himself,[a] meets with hard measure from his brethren among the Ultra-protestants. He protests most loudly against Popery. He takes the Bible, and the Bible only, for his guide. He affirms that in the Bible, interpreted according to the best of his ability, he cannot discover those great doctrines which we of the Church of England know to be the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. He is wrong, and we of the Church of England anathematize him, and refuse to regard him as a Christian. And so do many of the Ultra-protestant sects who hold, in fact, with us, the great fundamentals of Christianity. But on their own principles, what right can they have to do so? Of what crime has he, on their principles, been guilty? At the very most, he can only be guilty, as is stated above, of an obtuseness of intellect which has led to bad logic or to bad criticism. But, after all, for the Ultra-protestant to assert that the Socinian interprets Scripture wrongly is only to beg the very point in dispute. The Socinian says, 'I receive Scripture in what I believe to be the true sense, and so do you;—we differ as to what the true sense is, but this is only a difference of opinion, and you have no more right to blame *me* than I have to blame *you*.' We of the Church of England, while we defer to Scripture only, profess to receive Scripture as the Church always understood it, and by public documents in general councils, asserted its belief. We therefore have an arbiter to decide, when two meanings can be attached to one passage of Scripture, which to adopt, our object being not to ascertain what Scripture can be *made* to say, but what the Lord our God actually means. But for this, Ultra-protestants denounce us as papistical, and call our Church the *Church of the Traditioners*. They therefore are *ex hypothesi* excluded from this mode of arguing. We rejoice to find that they agree with us whenever they *do* agree. But we marvel when we hear them joining with us in censuring 'Unitarianism' as a heresy."

[a] He who worships the Father only cannot denominate himself a Socinian, for he is not one. He objects to the name because it is a reproachful designation, as well as an incorrect description.

as the Church always understood it, and by public documents in general councils, asserted its belief. We therefore have an arbiter to decide, when two meanings can be attached to one passage of Scripture, which to adopt." Let us see what weight the Church itself gives to the decision of this arbiter. The twenty-first article decides on the subject of General Councils, that "things ordained by them have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they are taken out of Holy Scripture." The case then stands thus—the meaning of Scripture must be ascertained from the interpretation of the Church, as promulgated in the decrees of councils,—which are valid so far, and so far only, as they are "taken out of Scripture." But surely it would be both simpler and safer, never to leave Scripture, than to make such a circuit as this, only to come back to it again, at the no small risk of losing ourselves by the way. The Church of England, then, has not on any consistent theory an authoritative arbiter. Her creeds only increase doubts and anxieties—assuredly they serve not to settle contentions, as the ceaseless controversies within her own bosom prove.

We now turn to the Church of Rome. She lays claim to five sources of authority—Scripture, tradition, the infallibility of the Pope, the decrees of councils, and the faith of the universal Church. An imposing array doubtless. But alas! history rudely awakens us from our commencing dream of certainty. Tradition, Popes, and Councils have varied from Scripture, from themselves, and from each other; and the faith of the universal Church is a test too vague to be applied to the interpretation of doubtful passages. He, therefore, who would

erect the structure of his faith on a sure basis, must seek for some firmer foundation on which to build, than the shifting quicksands of human authority.

Any man of ordinary intelligence who is anxious to do so, may ascertain why the various books of the New Testament were originally received as the records of a Divine revelation. Whatever may be his decision as to particular portions, he will feel that he has grounds for believing that he has before him the testimony of several eye and ear witnesses of the actions and teachings of Christ. The writings themselves however, and the doctrines which they contain, will be the strongest confirmation of his faith. From the records of revelation, such an inquirer will seek to ascertain its doctrines.

Acting on this principle, and regarding ourselves accountable not to each other, but to God only, we have formed our opinions as Unitarian Christians, and when brethren blame us for our doctrines, and look coldly upon us, we turn to our great instructor, and ask, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Sympathizing in our general conclusions, we meet in the same sanctuaries to worship our Father in heaven as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. We differ from the great majority of our fellow Christians in confining our worship to the Father only, and in the views which we entertain as to the mode in which sinful man is to be reconciled to his Maker. It is our opinions on the latter subject which have excited against us the greatest prejudice. Here too our sentiments have been least understood. Because we claim not salvation in consequence of the merits of another, it has been supposed that we seek the blessedness to come as the reward

of our own. We do no such thing. Had we done all, we acknowledge in the words of our Saviour, that we should have been but "unprofitable servants." Alas! who of us can tell how often he has offended? Our own hearts condemn us, but God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. Between man and his Creator, merit is, and ever must be, entirely out of the question. We do indeed believe that God of his abounding goodness will give us peace of heart if we seek to obey him; and that he will pardon the sinner upon repentance and newness of life. We believe that the merciful justice of the Most High is best set forth under the similitude of a wise and kind parent. A parent's *treatment* of his children will vary with their conduct. But does the feeling of love take its rise from their merit? Is it not strong before they can know good from evil? And do their imperfections, errors, sins even, quench his affection, or cause him to relax in his efforts and prayers for the holiness and the peace of his children? Let a father's heart give answer. Let a mother's undying love reply. Now, Jesus ever speaks of God as a father. He enjoins upon us the imitation of his love and forgiveness. Recall the parable of the prodigal son; of the Lord who forgave his debtor ten thousand talents because he had not wherewith to pay; his exhortation to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful; to forgive our offending brother as often as he shall come unto us, saying, "I repent;" the prayer we are to offer up, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Can you call to mind all this, and not feel that Jesus has distinctly taught that God can, and does for his own sake, forgive upon repent-

ance?—If so, then our Father needs not another's sufferings to win his love,—another's merits to satisfy his justice: and the systems which men have formed disappear like some mighty structure, from which the foundation has been suddenly removed.

The doctrine which prevails at the present day on this subject, and to which the terms evangelical, and essential have been applied, is that the sinner is saved by faith in the merits of Christ alone, who assumes the sinner's guilt, and bears its punishment, while the righteousness of Christ is transferred to the transgressor, who is now represented as saying,

> "The debt's discharged,
> The ransom's paid,
> My Father *must* forgive."

I entirely wave the question as to the possibility, the reasonableness or equity of such a transaction. It is sufficient for me that Christ teaches not this doctrine. And that he and his Apostles do inculcate the very reverse. "God was in Christ," says the Apostle Paul, "*reconciling the world* unto himself. We pray you in Christ's stead, be *ye reconciled* to God." Let this simple principle be reasoned out, and it will settle ten thousand controversies, and bring numbers whom the traditions of men have led astray, to the true, the simple, the merciful, yet equitable doctrines of the Gospel.

The views to which I have alluded, tend not only to shroud in darkness the mercy of our Father, but to separate man from his brother. They are represented as essential. "Believe them," it is said, "you are safe—reject them"—— The kind and gentle turn away from the contemplation of the alternative—they hope

yuo will not always reject them. Those who have less delicacy in announcing what they deem unpalatable truths, will tell you, "that not availing yourselves of the appointed means of averting God's wrath his countenance will be darkened towards you." These views are well calculated to excite such pity as is felt towards the lost—but not equal and fraternal love: they have been a prolific source of seeming coldness, and real restraint, in the social intercourse of life. They may lead to immense efforts to preserve others from destruction, yet not to the kindly communion of brethren, thinking differently, yet believing in the equal affection of a common Father.

Our sentiments as Unitarians have been represented as possessing no influence, like the views of orthodoxy, calculated to call forth powerful efforts for the propagation of our faith, as cold and deficient in sources of comfort. No doubt, to believe that the eternal woe or everlasting blessedness of a brother is contingent upon the holding of certain opinions, is a fearfully energetic motive to excite any man that has a heart, to seek to win a brother from a heresy which will draw upon him the frown of the Almighty Father, shut him out from peace on earth, and close against him the gates of heaven. We have not this motive. We humbly trust, by God's mercy, to meet in another and a better world those who see not with our eyes, or worship by our creed. We believe our master, when he says, that whosoever doeth the will of his Father in heaven "shall know of the doctrine:" *i. e.* shall be permitted to fall into no fatal error.

But because, in obedience to the injunction of Jesus,

we worship the Father only, believe in the forgiveness of sins, and that sincerely good but mistaken men may find the way to heaven—on these grounds is our faith negative, cold, and devoid of consolation? Surely when such charges are made, it is forgotten that our faith consists not in what we reject, but in what we retain; and that we reject nothing which Christ and his Apostles taught with regard to the will of God and the duties and expectations of man. If we have not reasons,—aye and influencing motives too,—for loving God, blessing man, and purifying our hearts—the deficiency must be sought, not in our faith, but in our own faithlessness. What is there, I would ask, in our sentiments to produce coldness of heart towards God? Is purchased mercy more valuable, more heart winning, than the pardoning love of a Father to a penitent child?—a love which no one hath described with such tender pathos as Christ himself—when he places a Father before us—falling on the neck of his returned and penitent son;—how deep his love! how full his joy! how much forgiven! And those our Saviour tells us will love most to whom most has been forgiven. Is there anything in our views which should cause us to fail in our love to Christ? Are his labours, sufferings and death of less value, and do they lose their influence over our hearts, because we believe that their object was to produce a change in us, and not in God? True, we regard the Saviour as the medium of the *Father's* mercy: but do we love our earthly friends less in proportion as we feel that the blessings which they confer are but God's gifts transmitted through their hands? Here let your hearts reply. Again: have we no powerful motives to make known *our* views of scriptural truth?

We may, indeed, believe that our brother will at length reach his Father's home without our aid, yet is that a reason why we should not be desirous to show him a plainer and a better path, when, anxious and fearful, he wanders midst tangled mazes lost? There may be much agony and suffering without the loss of final salvation. He knows not the value of truth or the evil of error, that will not labour and make sacrifices to promote the one or to remove the other. I would further ask, is forgiveness on repentance no comfort to the sinner? Have judgment and retribution no terrors for the hardened and the selfish? Is the consciousness of God's approval no consolation to him that is faithful but calumniated, and who in all the trials of life strives to conform his will to that of his Father? Is the prospect of another and a better world, where tears no more shall flow, and sorrow and sighing be exchanged for lasting peace, no comfort to the dying Christian that placeth his trust in God? Others may say so; but the Gospel, experience, and our own hearts, tell us otherwise. Let us, then, be grateful to the Father of mercies, that through Christ such motives, comforts, and hopes, are ours.

Conceiving that where we differ from our brethren, we recede from them to draw nearer to Christ, without supposing, however, that they are criminal, and subject to the anger of the Almighty, because they do not think as we do,—I now proceed to point out the position in which we stand, the peculiar dangers to which we are exposed, and the duties incumbent upon us as the worshippers of the Father only, and the defenders of free inquiry.

First, then, as to our position. The Christian world has to make choice between the principles of Unitarianism

and those of the Roman Catholic Church, between Scripture interpreted by authority and Scripture interpreted by individual judgment. There is no medium between believing either that God has, along with his revelation, given us an infallible expounder of it,—or else that each man is for himself to ascertain its meaning, using of course all aids and appliances within his reach, and praying that God would give unto him a single heart that no worldly hope, or fear, may unduly bias his decision.

The principle of testing the doctrines of men and ancient usages by an appeal to Scripture, and rejecting what was not consistent therewith, justified Luther and Zuinglius, Calvin and Servetus, Cranmer and Knox, in their separation from the Church of Rome. But this principle does not justify any man, or any body of men, in condemning fellow inquirers, who, appealing to the same authority, arrive at a different conclusion. To do this is not to vindicate Christian liberty, but merely to change the dynasty of spiritual dominion, and in some few unimportant respects to vary the form of bondage. Protestants have forgotten this when they have excluded from the Christian name, or sentenced to the penalties of heresy, those who have differed from themselves in the interpretation of the common standard of faith. When they condemn others they should claim infallibility, or return to that Church which does claim it. The peculiar evil of Popery consists in the assumption of power to condemn for differences of faith. All, therefore, who assume this power, under whatever forms they may exercise it, or by whatever mode they make seek to veil it, sanction a principle which has only to be carried out, to

lead to all the evils which have resulted from papal usurpation. We must go back to the Church of Rome, or admit the innocency of involuntary error.

The Church of Rome is in theory consistent and merciful; for while she declares heresy to be fatal, she offers herself as an unerring guide. The Unitarian also advocates principles which are consistent with each other. He points to Scripture as containing the revelation of God, and maintains that no sincere inquirer can fall into fatal error. But those Protestants who condemn their brethren for differences of faith are not consistent. They maintain that themselves indeed have attained unto essential and saving truth, yet that others who employ the same means have arrived at conclusions which endanger their acceptance with God. The Catholic admits, that if church authority be denied, the freedom of inquiry claimed by the Unitarian must be conceded, which being granted, not only will the doctrine of transubstantiation fall, but that of the Trinity also become untenable.

This inconsistency on the part of Protestants has been clearly perceived, and pointed out, by a section in the Church of England whose sentiments are propounded in the Oxford Tracts. This party, apparently an increasing one, dreading the consequences of unfettered scriptural investigation, clearly perceiving that the termination of the course would be Unitarianism, but having previously settled that Unitarianism is heresy, seek to maintain orthodoxy by proving the infallibility of what they would call the English Catholic Church, so far as such a pretension can be established with Scripture, history, and the authorities to which they appeal, against them. Having however placed themselves in the seat of autho-

rity, they read the following lesson to many inconsistent Protestants: "If," says Dr. Hook, vicar of Leeds and chaplain in ordinary to the Queen, in his letter to the Bishop of Ripon,* "the sufficiency of private judgment be admitted, it follows that there is but one heresy, and that is the rejection of the holy Scripture as the word of God. Receive the Scriptures, and then on this principle you are safe, whatever construction you put upon them. The Socinian (Unitarian) understands them in the sense which by attention to minute criticism, by comparing them with what he witnesses of the work of God in nature, and by consulting MSS. and various versions, he thinks they will bear. They who hold the sufficiency of private judgment may discuss with him, but further than this they have no right to go if they would be consistent. They have no right to call any one a heretic who, receiving the holy Scriptures, understands them to the best of his judgment." These are precious words, and though from a son of Oxford, well express the duty of a consistent Protestant. The same writer, with reference to those who profess the sufficiency of private judgment, says,† "We think that their opinions must lead logical and unprejudiced minds to Socinianism." Shall we then go to the Fathers, Church authority, creeds, or Assemblies' catechisms, in order to escape from the logical inferences of Scripture? If others do it, and call themselves orthodox, the Unitarian cannot do it. He has no anxiety to escape from any conclusion fairly deduceable from the teachings of Christ and his Apostles; and if he cannot learn God's will from them, he has no confidence in any other teachers.

* P. 10. † Vide "Call to Union," Note B, p. 48, 4th edit.

As the Unitarian then has everything to hope, and nothing to fear, from free inquiry, his position should always be the front rank in every conflict for religious liberty. No fear of man, or hope of man's favour; no jealousy of his fellow labourers, or suspicion that those who combat by his side will turn against him when united efforts have shaken off the bondage of old oppression, should cause him to desist from the struggle for religious freedom; a struggle in which he seeks no selfish object, but the present good and everlasting welfare of his fellow creatures.

An appeal to fact shows that freedom of investigation is conducive to the spread of Unitarianism, and that therefore as we value scriptural truth, it is incumbent upon us to remove ancient, and resist the imposition of new bondage. Churches and individuals, in proportion as they have been free, have shown a tendency to acknowledge the unity of God and his unpurchased mercy. Look to Geneva—look also to the untrammelled Presbyterians of England. The latter, without union, co-operation or creed, from the independent perusal of the Scriptures alone, have arrived at substantial uniformity of opinion, the result not of constraint, but freedom. Individual inquirers too—men of sincere and humble piety, unknown to fame,—as well as men of no mean note, freeing their minds from the dread of human authority, and reading for themselves the sacred word, have come to the conclusion that God is one and merciful. The names of Milton and Newton, of Locke and Whitby, of Watts, Lardner and Priestley, of Lindsay and of Belsham, are familiar to our mouths as household words. These men, indeed, though they were great and good,

were not infallible, nor are they quoted as authorities; they do, however, illustrate the assertion, that Scripture, freely and logically interpreted, tends to make men Unitarians.

Such facts suggest that our situation is one of no ordinary responsibility. He who has the truth, or believes himself to be in possession of much truth, which others have not, is bound not to keep the treasure to himself. God gave it to him not selfishly to enjoy, but freely to communicate.

In proportion, too, as we feel that we are delivered from man's dominion, the more should we realize our accountability to God, lest by any rashness or inconsideration on our part, truths which we value should be needlessly evil spoken of. Let there be no duplicity,—God forbid. But let what we utter be well-weighed, long-considered, time-tested opinions. Let us remember that the spoken word can never return; and that our responsibility is proportioned to our liberty.

Our position has its peculiar dangers. Standing as we do in a remarkable contrast to others, we shall be prone, unless diligently on our guard, to mistake the reverse of wrong for right. In seeking to avoid one evil, men often fall into its opposite. Because Scripture, reason, and our hearts tell us, that God's favour depends not on the items of a professed, implied or written creed, we should grievously err if we were therefore to infer that a man's opinions on religion were a matter of trifling importance. True, God will judge all men according to the light which they had. But is that a reason for withholding the light from any? Erroneous doctrines have often led to gloomy views of the Divine dispensations, and mingled bitter

drops in the very head-spring of life's stream. Many agonized minds would have possessed peace had there been those at hand to show them from the words of life that their doubts and fears with reference to the equity and mercy of God were vain. The pure doctrine of Jesus would have been balm to their wounded hearts, and soothed their feelings, agitated by man's misrepresentations of the dealings and attributes of the Most High.

Again. Because many have laid too much stress upon the services of the Lord's day, social worship, and religious forms, substituting them in part at least for heart-felt piety, self-knowledge, self-government, and the unostentatious love of man; we on the other hand, I fear, have not altogether escaped the danger of setting too light a value on the instrumental means of religion. It would be well, indeed, if our whole lives were a thanksgiving, and that every day were a Sabbath, a rest from sin and evil passion, and worldly conformity, and grasping selfishness; that every day should find us in our Father's work, our hands labouring for that which perisheth, our hopes fixed on that which endureth for ever. It would be well if it were so. But it is not likely to be so. Life's business, cares, interests, passions, and habits, so environ us on every side, and fill each moment of our time, that it is to be feared that he who doth not specially set apart one day in the week to quiet thought, religious worship, and closer intercourse with his family, will, when he ceases to employ the Lord's day for this work, give to it, not seven days, but none.

Further. We have read in history, and seen in our own day, that when men have met to promote what they deemed Christian truths, and sought by the power of

sympathy to encourage each other, they have oft-times out of union formed bondage. Are we, therefore, not to meet? Are we to make no combined efforts to promote the spread of opinions which seem to us a nearer approach to God's uncorrupted truth; and are we to shun the sympathy of heart with heart, through fear of spiritual domination? This would be to incur a greater evil in our anxiety to escape a less one. An excessive fear of bondage is not unfrequently the precursor of thraldom. Had a patriot army permanently disbanded itself through jealousy of Washington, would liberty have been a gainer? In religious matters, too, a well-regulated union will conduce to freedom. It will do this by enabling those combined, to make head against tyrannies of ancient date, and also, by acquainting our people with the sentiments of many talented men, will prevent the influence of any one of them from becoming unduly predominant even in those spheres of usefulness in which it is habitually exercised. Admitting in their full force all the dangers really connected with union, still I would ask, Have we so little confidence in ourselves? Cannot we resist undue assumption as it arises, or quit the association in which it should arise? It has been said of tyrants, they make a desert, and call it peace. Oh! let not the place where brethren ought from time to time to meet, and by their mutual presence encourage each other, be left desolate; and this neglect of the assembling of ourselves together be regarded as a proof of liberty. Enlightened by the experience of the past, let us seek the blessings of union, while, knowing them, we avoid its dangers.

And now a word or two in conclusion, as to the duties of our situation.

As believers in Christ, let us with lowly reverence listen to him who was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the spirit of holiness, and resurrection from the dead. As we hear him speak of our heavenly Father, let us draw near unto our God, with child-like and trustful affection. Let the proof of our gratitude and affection to him be seen in our efforts to add to the happiness and remove the sufferings of our fellow-creatures. Let the bodily, the intellectual, the moral and spiritual wants of no human being be to us a matter of indifference. As sinners, let us unburthen our hearts before our Father. The realization of God's paternal forbearance and mercy, while it deepens our contrition, will strengthen us to resist temptation. The love of God is the best defence against every fearful, every alluring form of sin. Though we may know that moral contamination will bring agony in many ways, yet those who have learned of Christ will consider as the greatest evil of sin its unfitting them for confiding communion with the Father of their spirits. He who feels that he has in God a parent, and in heaven an eternal home, has within him hopes bright and deathless—which mingling with all the feelings of existence, illumine the dark clouds of affliction with a heavenly radiance, and communicate to every passing joy a more pure and intense delight. Be it ours, beloved, so to learn of Jesus as to attain unto that blessed peace which the world can neither give nor take away!

But he who is in possession of this peace will not be able to enjoy it alone. Those whom he loves will be made partakers of it. He who believeth in the Father and his unpurchased mercy, will teach his faith unto his children. By it all the intercourse, cares, and pleasures

of home will be sanctified. The influence may be unseen, but, like a healthful atmosphere, will be ever present. The questioning child will not be left untaught as to the source of its Father's peace. Here, too, what a scene of duty opens out to the conscientious and enlightened Christian mother! While the Unitarian parent makes known his own best conclusions, he will not with unworthy fears seek to fetter the minds of his children by imposing *his own views* upon them *as essential*; mindful of his own accountability to the great Parent, he will tell his children that Christ is the teacher sent from God, and to follow his parents only where they have followed Jesus.

There are those who, as it seems to me, have mistakingly maintained that the young should be kept in ignorance on the subject of religious differences. Here again we have the reverse of wrong for right. If the parent does not instruct, others will; if he will not satisfy his child's inquiries, others will; if he will not make known those views which he thinks true, others more zealous than himself will deeply impress on the soft and tenacious mind, opinions which he deems untrue. We may give even to a child reasons for our faith, without cramping the intellect, or contracting the heart. Nay, more. True charity, forbearance, regard to others' mental rights, cannot be properly inculcated till he who receives the lesson in some degree begins to feel its needfulness. He who totally neglects the instruction of his child on these matters, has no security that he will not become a narrow-minded religious partizan. He, on the other hand, who early shows the young the things that differ, may extirpate, as soon as seen, the germ of theolo-

gical bitterness, and teach the lesson to last through life, that a faith altogether true, and able even to work miracles, without charity, is as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Then again. He who in early life has had communicated to him no distinct views on religious subjects, and the reasons on which they are founded, is in danger of subsequently forming his opinions, not from unbiassed scriptural inquiry, but from a view to his worldly interests. Now, though bigotry is a great evil, yet it is not an entirely selfish feeling. If it be often a source of bitter suffering to others, yet not unfrequently it will itself make great sacrifices for what it regards as the cause of God and the spiritual good of man. There is in it, therefore, something worthy of respect compared with that but too common form of selfishness which leads men to sacrifice their religious convictions on the altar of worldly aggrandizement, and to cease from worshipping God in spirit and in truth, in order that they may be enabled to pay a more devoted homage to their fellow-creatures. Paul was a bigot once. But when his errors were replaced by the truths of the Gospel, his warm and self-forgetting energy made him one of the world's best benefactors. Yet what blessings did the time-serving Herodians ever confer upon mankind!

Let not then the vain fear of making bigots of your children restrain you from communicating unto them your own views of truth, and the reasons on which they are based. With the views which you have to teach, you must indeed be unskilful instructors if you cannot tell your children to love the Father, and why they should love him, without estranging their hearts from the brethren.

Teach them this lesson, and then, whether in their maturer years they abide in the faith of their fathers, or depart from it, they will not make another profession in order to gain a fortune, or raise themselves to a higher grade in society. Or should they fall away from their integrity, you will have no share in the guilt of such a dereliction from principle.

Lastly, if it be our duty to communicate our views of scriptural truth to our children, a like motive, a feeling of their inestimable worth, will cause us to make them known to the world, and to co-operate with our fellow-believers in proclaiming to our brethren the reason of the hope that is in us, that thus we may show forth its worth, and the firm basis on which it rests.

But above all, beloved, let us by our lives and conversation prove the power of our inward faith, that others, seeing our good works, may be led to glorify our Father in heaven.

AMEN.

MAY 28, 1841.

THE END.

Printed by RICHARD KINDER, Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey.

THE LAW OF CONSCIENCE, IN ITS ACTION ON NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS.

T 13/11

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 18TH, 1842,

BEING

THE SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

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A SERMON.

Acts xxiii. 1.

And Paul, earnestly beholding the Council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

There are some things, proceeding from some men, which we at once condemn as false or vain-glorious. The same things, proceeding from others, we are ready to receive as true in themselves, and becoming to the parties uttering them. Of this last kind is the assertion before us in our text. From many we would not receive this saying: it would only speak to us of the presumption of those who uttered it. From others we would accept it without hesitation; it would neither challenge our denial nor excite our disapproval. And the reason of this difference is, that some men have a right to say it, and only say it when it is right; while others have never any right to say it, and therefore can never say it when it is right.

St. Paul was a prisoner, and called upon to defend himself before the council of his nation. He stood before them—a man, who a few years previously had been a vigorous impugner, and was now as vigorous an upholder, of what that council had denounced to be schismatical and false. He stood before them—a man, who a few years previously had resolutely maintained all

the rites and usages of their fathers, and was now virtually pledged to the gradual extinction of many of the most important of them. It was to have been expected, therefore, that in his altered position he would declare, either that he had been a moral delinquent, and was now convinced of the error of his ways ; or that his present course was a mistaken one, and that he was willing to revert to that which he had abandoned.

The Council were all silent, and the prisoner looking at them earnestly, said, " Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." A position so lofty, an appeal so unexpected, an assertion of moral consistency so deliberate, in circumstances so questionable, had never occurred to their imaginations as possible, from a prisoner charged as Paul was ; and the High Priest, forgetful in his bewildered rage of the dignity that became his office, " commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth."

Now there was no man on whose spirit his past life could have lain more heavily, than did that of the Apostle Paul upon his. He was cut to the heart, when he reflected on how he had persecuted God's people, in the days of his young and misdirected zeal. To the hour of his death would he not forget that it was he, at whose feet they laid Stephen, the first martyr's clothes, while the enraged mob slew him. In the bitter memory of such things he would call himself the last and least of the Apostles ; would fear that all his future exertions could scarce undo the evil he had done. Before the proper tribunal he would mourn, not triumph in the past. But before this, calling him to account for what he was convinced was the dictate of an enlightened con-

science, he had no regret to express, no apology to make. From first to last, even in the most mistaken actions, he had done all as unto God, and not as unto men. This then was his support and his defence. "His conscience was his strong retreat."

And here, my brethren, the good man will ever find his great and only-sufficient stay and comfort, in all the positions in which through life he may be placed by others, or may place himself. If, though in the consciousness of omissions innumerable,—of short-comings and errors most lamentable,—he yet can say of his main purpose, of the motives which have led to his chosen line of conduct, that they have been pure and single,—that he has endeavoured to walk, as a thinker, speaker, and doer, in the path which the voice of truth within his own heart has pointed out to him, then may he stand, with head unbowed, with voice and mien unbroken, before any tribunal, great or small, upon the earth, and bend at length before the judgment-seat of the infinite Father of all mercies, in the humble hope of a compassionate approval at the hands of Him who accepteth the sincere purpose, even while he seeth the inadequate fulfilment.

This passage of the Apostolic History then, in fact, makes known to us a principle, whose importance in matters, both of conduct and of opinion, it is not easy to over-estimate. It declares to us plainly, that there is one law of action, above all others, binding on us: that there is one basis of belief, above any article that can be built upon it, imperative: a basis, without which the performance of absolute right, and the confession of absolute truth, are worthy of no approbation, and with

which the performance of what may in itself be unwise, and profession of what may in itself be incorrect, shall entail upon the agent no moral guilt. That law and that basis are the individual conscience, and by this I mean, not a man's caprice or fancy, not his predilection or desire, not even his best theory of what is politic or wise; but that judgment which is formed after the most deliberate and serious reflection, formed apart from selfish considerations or impure mixture, formed under the felt presence of God, and with a view only to God's glory. The feelings of piety and trust, of disinterestedness and benevolence, of integrity and courage, that associate themselves with the exercise of any conscientious judgment so formed, will more than compensate, even in the life of the individual probably, but certainly in the life of the world, for any error in conduct, or any inaccuracy of sentiment, with which these qualities can possibly have been associated.

The operations of this principle might be traced in all the forms of human life—in our individual and social, our private and public, our local and general, our speculative and practical, and our religious and political relations. But aware of the limited time which the present opportunity, even when used to the utmost, will place at our disposal, and mindful of the occasion which calls us together to-day, and of the purposes which we are assembled to promote, I shall, with your permission, endeavour to trace the effects of this great principle, exclusively in its theological bearings, and in its reference to ourselves, as citizens, and as members of this Association.

May God grant his blessing on the words which shall

now be uttered, and may we who are here assembled, be disposed to seek for that solid improvement from the present occasion, which shall send us on our way of life, rejoicing in the possession, and anxious for the extension, of those benign views of Gospel truth which we believe to be best calculated to promote God's glory with his children, and his children's happiness with each other.

The first clear deduction from the law of conscience, as suggested by our text, is this,—that while absolute truth is a good, at which man is required to aim, individual truth is a possession which he is required to have. The attainment of logical truth it declares must be his earnest desire, but the attainment of ethical truth is his imperative duty. The one he may strive to reach, and not be able to attain ; but the other he can always attain, if he will only strive to reach it. The one, therefore, is an object of effort, the other a subject of command. Though logically or absolutely wrong at one period of his public career, St. Paul was ethically right through the whole of it ; and therefore, though he stood there, the very man, who to the Christians had been Saul bound with letters from the High Priest to Damascus, and to the Jews, was now Paul, invested with the commission of Jesus Christ, he could yet say with truth, in the face of all,—" Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

The necessary consequence, then, of the application of this law to men of different temperaments, different capacities and positions, and different degrees of information, (that is, in truth, to mankind,) is, that a great variety of opinions should arise on important, just as

much as upon unimportant matters, and that at the very moment that truth in its logical existence is one, truth in its ethical existence is manifold.

Now where the law of liberty exists, together with this law of conscience, the reality within finds a genuine expression in some reality without: and that which by the latter springs up secretly in the soul, will, by the former, be brought out openly in the life. But where no such law of liberty exists in harmony with this law of conscience, the internal development is checked, and the external manifestation precluded. In some countries, the law of the state does thus set itself against this law of conscience, and if the first be in great, and the second in low vigour, the first of course will triumph. The law of the state in this case lives by the death of the law of the conscience. The powers of darkness triumph and the powers of light are permitted for a season to be overwhelmed. Short-sightedness prevails over a far-reaching providence, apparent expediency over a genuine principle, and the wisdom of man is permitted to battle, till defeated by seeing its own folly, against the purposes of omniscience. In those countries where no state law interferes, or where its interference is in the course of gradual removal, the law of the conscience takes its natural and unimpeded development in a great variety of sentiment, so as to lead—for particular purposes, at least, such as worship and religious instruction, where a certain extent of agreement, a certain peace and repose and freedom from strife are absolutely required—to a separation or division, involving however, in itself and necessarily, no other kind of separation.

Where the law of the state, then, triumphs over the

law of conscience, there we find Uniformity. Where the law of the conscience triumphs over, or has not to struggle with, an opposing law of the state, there will arise Sectarianism. The one situation of matters is artificial, can only exist by sufferance and for a time, and must ultimately terminate in a breaking out of the differences which it was designed to prevent. The other is natural, exists in agreement with a Law of God, and must, in accordance with all God's Laws, result, when it has ceased to be presumptuously impeded in the working out of its high behest, in assured peace and universal good.

Now many sigh over this last state of things as a great evil, and no man perhaps in his more desponding or more worldly moments is so apt to do so as the Unitarian; because, in the first place, he does not attach the same practical importance even here, to the discrepancies which exist among different sects, and still less does he attach the infinite importance of an infinite hereafter to them. And because, in the next place, he is more exposed than others to suffer the penalties of the strife, presenting usually a more sensitive frame to the blast of bigotry that blows round him, having his devoted head selected as the common centre whereon all parties unite to outpour the vials of their wrath, being in fact the theological scape-goat of the world, on whom all other sects fasten their several animosities and sins, and then send into the wilderness.

He sometimes therefore is disposed to shrink from this distasteful conflict. He says, "This war of elements is absolutely so fearful; it is so destructive to the Christian spirit; makes the mild voice of our religion so inaudible

by its uproar, the sweet influence of our Master's charity so powerless by its overbearing bigotry, that I for my part feel little drawn to add mine to the Babel of tongues which already prevails around me, shall rather wish to withdraw that nutriment for its flames which my heresy seems in truth to be affording, and shall be content to worship God according to my conscience, where law and custom both allow me, and where they do not, either to worship him as others do, or after my own fashion, in the quietude of my own spirit. At least I will withdraw from all proceedings which appear to aggravate or proclaim these differences. I shall not care to convince others, and if I feel obliged to live out my own conscientious difference, I shall not so much regret if that difference dies out with me, and lifts up its head no more in my household and my place."

Now without seeking to meet this state of mind with the usual epithets of "worldly," "cowardly," and "insincere," I would endeavour to point out, first, the characteristic good of this decried Sectarianism, resulting as it does from the free operation of the law of conscience on our mind as a nation; and, secondly, the obligations which this same law of conscience lays upon us as Unitarians, in the midst of the Sectarianism thus created. The evils, by which the theological differences of our country are accompanied, are brought before us with painful frequency, and are unfortunately but too well known to us. This is the last assembly in the world, before whom it would be necessary to enumerate them. A more useful task to us, one more accordant with what I trust is our prevailing disposition as a religious body, will be to show the good which exists in this, as in all other of the divine

dispensations ; for a dispensation of Providence we cannot deny our Sectarianism to be, when traced, as it has now been, to the law of conscience, acting freely upon the circumstances in which we are placed. But before I pass away from these evils, not to allude to them again, allow me to say, that though they accompany, they do not by any means principally arise from our differences or divisions into sects. Want of charity does not necessarily ensue from want of unity. It is not our differences on the doctrine of the Trinity, or on that of Original Sin, or even on that of the Atonement, which cause, as such, the evils of our Sectarianism. They spring from man's presumptuous attachment to these differences of eternal salvation or eternal woe.

The beneficial tendency of Sectarianism, as such, is in the first place, then, to bring home to men's minds this all-important fact, that religion is an individual personal thing, that has to do with each of them. The religion of states and churches, of governments and nations, when pressing all things into its own uniformity, is too massive and extraneous an influence to succeed always in realizing this sentiment of individuality in its due force and impressiveness. No one man feels it so much his own concern as the concern of some large body, on whose capacious shoulders he reverently lays it. Each man has a prevailing impression that the state supports religion, that the clergy look after it, and that the church preserves it. You startle and alarm him when you say, "I have a message of God unto *thee*." Like a verger in some great cathedral, who moves about in the exercise of his small but accustomed duties, without sense of discomfort or insufficiency, persuaded by some half-confessed idea, that the preservation

of the edifice is the affair of the clergy, or the bishop, or even of the Almighty, becomes suddenly stricken with alarm, should you tell him that it depends very importantly on himself, and that a single act of negligence on his part might wrap it in flames. So the child of some undisturbed and universally received establishment, who walks midst the sacred spiritual edifice of religion, unconcernedly performing his own small function of personal attendance upon services, or due observance of usual rites, becomes alarmed or at least aroused if you draw nigh and say to him, "Stand up, for thou thyself also art a man."

The summons to think, to decide, to act, the declaration that he is bound as a reasonable and responsible being to do so, reach him only in the earnest voice of schism or dissent. His soul is awakened to new feelings; his conscience to new demands; he becomes the subject of solemn and absorbing interests; he will not accept his religion by proxy; he will hear and learn and settle for himself. When God speaks to him he now hath ears to hear. Religion is no longer a mere corporate affair; it is individual. It has to do with himself. God dwelleth not now indeed to him in temples made with hands; he feels that he himself may be, if he wills it, the temple of his holy spirit. A fresh centre is thus given, round which may revolve, with more intensely gravitating power, a fresh circle of emotions and aspirations. It is not one large dull heart, that, beating heavily at the centre, scarcely can send its streams of life-blood to the extremities of the religious body, but a hundred hearts, that, beating rapidly, yet harmoniously, circulate, in no sluggish currents, the life-stream of genuine religious

thought and feeling through every portion of the extended frame. Each man is thus brought nearer to some nucleus of thought and action, which befits and suits and attracts him. Each finds some duty in the church for him to do, some congenial movement with which he can identify himself, some view or principle or doctrine, which he can contribute to support and to develop. And he feels himself thereon a Christian and a man: united more closely, and attached more warmly, to his faith; elevated nearer towards the felt presence of God; worshipping his Maker now in spirit and in truth.

Bound too as he is to that view of Christianity, which has obliged him to separate to some extent from his fellows, he is bound also to commend his doctrine to them by the consistency and purity of his conduct. Thus an increased attention to the duties of morality becomes imperative, and flows from the natural action of a genuine Sectarianism. The obligations of religion, and the knowledge of these obligations, are more deeply impressed upon the mind, by being brought as it were face to face with a man, as his own personal concern. And to this is added, as I have said, the natural and ennobling anxiety, that the truth which he has embraced shall not suffer by him or by his conduct. God's eye is more than ever upon his heart, and his own eye is more than ever on it too.

It is said by Mr. Finney, in his Lectures on Revivals,* that no movement in the religious world, no new sect or church, ever flourishes, unless supported by a high tone of morality among its members. That whatever excite-

* I cannot, at this moment, lay my hand on the exact passage in which these remarks are made, but believe the allusion in the text to be substantially correct.

ment may do at the beginning, it always dies out, unless it exhibit some peculiarly beneficial and operative influence on the life and heart. And unquestionably this has been, to a great extent, the tendency of those divisions in doctrine and discipline, which, under the name sects, have grown up and taken root among us. The national sense of religion, the national sentiment of piety, the national conviction of the duty of strict moral conduct, have increased with their increase.

A second advantage which we may trace as arising out of the Sectarianism of our land, connected indeed with that which has been already mentioned, but which still is worthy of a distinct reference, is this: that as our Maker has implanted in us temperaments of a very various character, dispositions, mental structures, spiritual wants, materially differing from each other, one great good, arising from a variety of modes in religious address and appeal, is the suitability which thence ensues to almost every diversity of the religious character in ourselves. In fact, our Sectarianism is a free land's external manifestation of this internal diversity. It is the bursting out of that which is within; it is the soul's demand for the spiritual nurture most suited to it. And this it was that John Wesley perceived in his ever-memorable move. He said, there was a religious sentiment existing in the nation, as yet untouched; a religious capability, as yet undeveloped. He said to the church, there is religion in the heart of the people, only you know not how to awaken it. Your clergy, your forms, your discipline, may be suited to many, but to many more they are unsuited. Even though you could put a good heart of faith and energy into your men, their very forms and

modes of address would trammel them. We must have something more hearty, more earnest, than that formalism of yours, which is now cold and dead to the bulk of the people. Every sect acts upon the same principle. It is not schismatic. It is not heretical. It is a truthful demand, to give external development to that which has a genuine inward existence.

The stately and necessarily formal ministrations of one sole National Church, in whatever country, will be alien to the feelings and unequal to the wants of multitudes of its professed members. It will have no power over them. It cannot call the mighty spirit of good out of the deep of their hearts. They are then dead branches of this vine. But allow a free development to the expression of the religious idea, and some form arises, some method of address is struck out, which lays hold of the hearts of these outcasts, breathes life and vigour and earnestness into their spiritual relations. Christianity is adapted to every clime, to every nation ; but only because it abstains from prescribing minutiæ of doctrine and obstinacy of form ; only because it pours forth influences and principles over the heart of man, and leaves the carrying of them out to those modes and times and fashions, which that heart deviseth as most suited to itself. And that nation alone receives Christianity in the true spirit of its own preaching, that receives it as a heavenly and guiding influence, free to mould itself into the forms that its free life shall dictate. Thus, and thus alone, it becomes a universal religion, a religion for man, in whatever clime, and in whatever circumstances living. Fetter its expression, cramp its appeal, insist upon uniformity, banish Sectarianism, and in due time you banish

itself—or leave it, like a half-extinct root, that fails to minister the requisite sap to its branches, but allows them to extend leafless and fruitless from the trunk.

Again, though at present producing effects so much the contrary, I yet think that the prevalence of Sectarianism is the only means of placing mental charity on a firm and secure basis in any country. Charity may exist, owing to the existence of nothing calculated to challenge a *want* of charity ; and in no country does it appear outwardly to be in a more flourishing condition, than in that in which there are no differences likely to draw out feelings opposed to it. Nowhere does it appear outwardly so powerful, as where the reality of its power has not been tested. While all is smooth, all is kind. While all is uniformity, all is charity. While all is acquiescence on one part, domination is not put forth upon the other. But this is not, in a free country, or in any other country, a fitting or a secure basis for charity. No real tested charity can exist, except in the midst of differences. Charity consists in allowing those differences. Charity consists in thinking no worse of any man for conscientiously differing from you. Now it is clear, that until Sectarianism has fought its battles out, a general disposition to allow of religious liberty cannot be proved to exist; and therefore no firm and enduring foundation for charity can be said to be laid.

For this reason, though England may appear now, as compared with continental nations, the hot-bed of religious strife and partizanship, and, unfortunately, is so at present, yet is she working out for herself a surer result of peace and liberty, perhaps, than many of those other nations can be regarded as possessing in their present

state of superficial repose. The religious peace of many of our continental neighbours may only prove the calm which precedes the storm. Though discussion has indeed taken place, and is still taking place among them, it has only as yet been among the educated and the reflecting. But religion is a question that never can be settled at head-quarters. It is the people's question, and sooner or later, in one generation or another, it will and it must be discussed by them. Religious controversy, or we much mistake, will have yet, in those countries, to come down from the pedestal of learning, to emerge from the student-closet of the professor and the divine, and exhibit itself for the fight in the arena of the public mind. And then it may be found that Great Britain has only appeared the hindmost, because she has been the foremost in the race, and by the time that our Sectarianism is landing us in the wished-for haven of peace, and charity, and mutual allowance, the battle may have to be begun in other nations, and the career of religious liberty yet to run.

The general and systematic education of our country has been lately, it must be granted, much impeded by our Sectarianism. But there is an education going on among us, that perhaps, under the good guidance of Providence, may prove eventually to be worth more than any that a state-government, if allowed by the hostility of sects, or a state-church, if allowed by its own indolence in peace, or its jealousy and alarm in contention, could have conferred upon us, had they been unimpeded in their attempts. And this good result, if it come, will come from our Sectarianism: for we are educating ourselves; going through a thousand tedious and mistaken

processes, indeed committing and retrieving error after error in our course, wanting, apparently, some light of guidance, and yet perpetually striking out that light from the flinty hardness of unpropitious circumstances for ourselves. Is it too much to say, that had the British Parliament been left to its own suggestions, had the English Church been left to its own impulses, had Sectarianism never lifted up its many-headed form in this our island, we should not have had even the education which we have? Is it too much to say, that that very desire for a systematic and national education, which now so generally exists, is itself the growth and the fruit of the valuable though unsystematic education already furnished by Sectarianism? Has not the national mind, by its own unguided development, raised itself up into the light of this desire and aim? Has not the sunday-school commenced by Raikes, has not the day-school commenced by Lancaster and followed up by Bell, have not these things, arising from a movement, made neither by the Church nor the Government, but by the people—the people split up into sects, and carrying out their own plans therefore without check—been, as the only parents of the education which we have, so the real parents also of that which we hope to have?

There is, too, a culture that is independent of school and book and slate, and which comes by the ear. The inquiring spirit of Protestantism, manifested in the number of our sects and divisions, has contributed immensely to the spread of this culture. While our religious and moral habits as a people have been promoted by the religious influences of our several places of worship, our understanding of Scripture, our know-

ledge of the nature of evidence and of the grounds of our theological convictions, have been also promoted by the discussions and arguments carried on there too. As by the public meeting we are conducted, through many a mistake though it be, to a knowledge of our political condition, so by the religious meeting we are conducted, though also through many an error, to increased intellectual acumen, and moral enlightenment.

Lastly, the spirit of liberty is closely connected, both in its origin and in its course, with the existence of religious divisions, or Sectarianism. There is a deeper meaning than we always realize in the connection exhibited in that old and favourite sentiment, "Civil and Religious Liberty all over the world." The history of our country, and indeed of the modern world, if carefully examined, would show how frequently the assertion of Religious Liberty has preceded and produced the assertion of Civil Liberty. Men are more roused by the necessity of obeying their consciences, than by the desire of social privileges. They rebel more against the interference which comes between themselves and God, than against that which comes between themselves and man. They resist more strenuously the despotism which says, "Thou shalt not worship God according to thy conscience," than that which says, "You shall not have the civil privileges to which your natural rights entitle you."

It was the demand for religious liberty, struggling in the schisms and sections which followed the æra of the Reformation, which produced that resolute, nay exorbitant, demand for civil privileges, the not yielding in

time to which, cost Charles I. his crown and head. It was the fear of an invasion on their religious liberty that determined the nation to stop, at its commencement, the policy of James II., and brought about the settlement of 1688. It was the earnest contest of the Nonconformist for the freedom of his worship, of the Friend for the inviolability of his conscience, of the Catholic for the practice of his religion, of the Jew for the exercise of his ancient faith, evincing themselves in struggles, at first for bills of indemnity and relief, and finally for measures of universal emancipation, that brought on and sanctified and solemnized that other movement, partly contemporaneous and partly resulting, by which such an advance has taken place in our liberties as citizens; and the very men that were foremost in their assertion of religious liberty, were generally foremost also in their demand for civil rights. And it was natural. Had no differences in Church matters arisen, there would have been few in State either. Religion is an instrument of solemn power. It will bow man down to incredible endurance, if it impresses submission as a duty; or raise him to the most heroic self-sacrifice and the encounter of the most frightful perils, if it encourage resistance as a duty.

Where their religion taught men that they must obey God rather than men, the decrees of human legislation were powerless to resist the differences of worship and of faith, which their consciences dictated; and when the Pilgrim Fathers landed in New England, with their freedom to worship God there, they took with them also the inheritance of their subsequent resistance to arbitrary infringement of their civil rights. Earnest men value

their souls more than their bodies, and the flame of resistance which violations of their civil rights are not enough to excite, the violation of their religious rights instantly illumes ; and when thus illumed by this higher cause in one generation, it becomes capable of being illumed by the lower cause in another. The long assertion of the religious right gives a better and a gradually increasing conception of the other rights and liberties of man.

We are led, then, by such considerations as these, to acquiesce in the theological divisions of our country, as the genuine product of our spiritual law of conscience, and our national law of liberty. We acquiesce in them as a necessity ; a necessity, however, that we rejoice to believe is not without its providential result of good. It remains for us to ask, what obligations this same law of conscience lays upon men individually, and upon us in particular, as forming parts of this Sectarianism.

And here, I think, the full extent of its concernment is not at all times sufficiently discerned. In the selections or changes of Religious Communion which men make, we speak too much of the influence their conduct may have on the world of religious opinion, and overlook that which it may have on the world of the individual moral agent. The Churchman sees a man of mark and influence giving his countenance to the cause of Dissent, or witnesses large portions of a humbler class of society, who of course carry with them a collective influence, swelling its ranks ; and he laments it bitterly, because he declares that he believes in his heart that the Church to which he belongs, is in this country the only bulwark of truth and order, and that in the progress of Dissent, he

sees the progress only of insubordination, anarchy and error. The Dissenter witnesses with grief that is similar, though arising from dissimilar sources, secessions from his own body and what he thinks truth, to the Church and what he thinks error. He laments it, he says, because in the present state of Established Churches, with Dissent and its vigorous existence, is identified the cause of human rights, and the principles of religious liberty: because he regards strict creeds and numerous articles, as so many traps for the candour, the conscience and the integrity of man, incompatible with that service which is perfect freedom, and unfavourable to the spread of truth: and because, for men first to secede from a Church on the ground of certain undue restrictions, and false principles and doctrines, and then to return to it, before the very causes for which they seceded are removed, is to stultify themselves as far as they have individually acted, and to throw back those predecessors who sacrificed the homes of their affection and the bread of their children to the principles of religious liberty and conscientious act, into the position of reasonless schismatics, whose labours and sufferings, as far as their efforts can go, they at least are disposed to nullify.

The so-called orthodox in his religious faith laments the departure of the Unitarian from what he deems the truth, because, he says, "that man is voluntarily giving up the means of his salvation, he is throwing himself unthinkingly on God's uncovenanted mercies, and, to the extent of the influence of his example and countenance, inducing others to adopt the same rash and dangerous course. And the Unitarian, if any, entertaining his own sentiments, refuse to profess them, or if, having professed them once,

they afterwards apparently disavow them, and add the influence of their name and religious profession to the creeds and sentiments entertained by the so-called orthodox, bewails the insincerity or the secession in the same way; for he says, "Now the truth of God is, as far as human discernment can penetrate, put back one step. One less will now fight its battles, one less support its cause. That one, by withholding his countenance, or withdrawing it, does despite to the grace of God, which had given him a better understanding of his ways, and to the brethren, who still continue to bear what obloquy or inconvenience may attach to the profession, whose burden he has now increased, by refusing honestly to bear his own share of it, and throwing it undivided back upon their shoulders."

These are the common modes of bewailing the selection or change of religious denomination, which is continually taking place among the various parties in the world of opinion; and in reference to the parties concerned, the ground of complaint is a true one. That is, each party *with* its views, firmly, conscientiously, and seriously held, has a legitimate reason for bewailing, on the ground specified, the changes which, from their believed injurious nature, it deprecates.

But there is a wider ground of gratulation or complaint involved in reality in these outward differences and changes, than this showing of it exhibits, and there is another truth involved in them, higher even than the Denominational truth, high though that may be. That ground is the universal ground of conscience, that truth is the truth of the individual soul. A man, perceiving how the eulogies of one party make up for the disapproval

of another, the good qualities in the sect joined compensate for those of the sect abandoned, and knowing that he cannot say absolutely, whatever feelings and convictions he may have upon the subject himself, what is truth, may think that the matter of his selection or his change is a thing indifferent. No! no decision on subjects so important and so serious can be indifferent. On the contrary, the period of his decision is a crisis in his moral being. He comes out of that crisis, a worse or a better man; he does not come out the same. I do not mean in reference to the views which he has adopted, but independently of them; in reference to the grounds on which he has acted. He comes out of the decision, as out of an ordeal, an innocent or a guilty man. He comes out with the mirror of his candid soul, suffused or clear. This depends, not on the peculiar nature of the views which he has adopted, but the peculiar character of the motives influencing to the adoption.

I suppose we may allow that many decisions (I say not in connection with any one party, for I stand not now on the truth of a sect, but the truth of a soul) on the weighty subject of religious profession are the result, not of compelled or convinced understanding and affections, but of an easy, negligent, indifferent sliding into whatever party in the world it seems most comfortable, according to the situation of the person, to be in. One sect may lament, and another may rejoice, but there are angels of truth and honour above, that weep or joy at the sight on far different grounds. The man who makes his selection or his change on a subject so high and pure, on grounds so low and impure, has not ceased to be the respectable member of one community, and

become the respectable member of another. He has ceased to be respectable at all. He has not changed his views, but lost his principle, and hence the real ground of lamentation, whatever party he may have joined, over that fallen spirit. That outward change is indicative of an inward change, and that change perhaps not of the kind that seemeth. It is not that from a chapel-goer he has become a church-goer, or the reverse, from an orthodox person a Unitarian, or the reverse, but that, go where he will, the companion he once took with him he takes with him no more ; the ground on which he once stood, he stands on no more. He has lost, not his orthodoxy nor his heresy, but something greater, something from which all these derive their value,—he has lost his principle. He may think he has only made a speculative change ; he has made a moral change : he has allowed himself to be acted upon by unworthy motives in one respect, and he has given them henceforth a right of passage though his heart. The world, or his world, did one thing in religious matters, and he did it ; the world, or his world, do other things in temporal matters, and so may he. He did as others did, and because others did, in one and a very sacred and serious part of his conduct, and why should he not in another, certainly not more serious or more sacred ? His laxness of principle in one particular, though he sees it not, runs through him. He is henceforth a weaker man in every respect to persevere in a labour for the right, a weaker man in every respect to resist the wrong. His reason has received a drug, which did not put it asleep for the single hour that was intended, but has dimmed its gaze for ever, and in whatsoever direction turned.

His conscience has received a blow, that has not stunned it for the time, but deadened it for aye.

We cannot say that a man, who from being an honest Unitarian has become an honest Trinitarian, or from an honest Trinitarian has become an honest Unitarian, is for that change in any respect a worse man. But either of these changes, when arising in no steady, devoted, God-fearing, truth-loving principle, but from caprice or worldly-mindedness, must be accompanied by absolute moral deterioration. If we have seen the orthodox by profession, attracted by the novelty, the boldness, the freedom of the Unitarian system, adopt it without those accompanying restraints and devotional influences which ought to go hand in hand with these others, gliding into it with levity, without due consideration, from association, interest or mere desire of change, I fear no good, but perhaps even evil has ensued. The old moorings, if he ever had any, of his moral nature have been unloosed, and in the eye of God, and in the eye of moral and universal truth, I believe that man stood better as an upright man, holding indeed some theological errors, but holding them in seriousness and honesty, than as a loose and careless professor of something nearer speculative truth, from around which he had stripped all its moral drapery.

And if we have seen the Unitarian, at one time firm and happy in his faith, feeling its moral beauty and its moral control, feeling support and encouragement, not liberty and indifference, from its revelations of that God of love and mercy it delighteth to pourtray, afterwards touched by influences and arguments of more material

mould, breathed on by the world's breath, raising by slow degrees within the shrine of his heart an Idol God, where should have been, and once was, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and slipping, gliding away by slow degrees, not like an upright man, compelled by the grave and solemn voices of an irresistible conviction, but slipping by the undermining influence of the world into a form of faith, which after all did not satisfy his wants, nor command his respect, nor fill his affections, which gave him not the moral and intellectual support his more vigorously trained understanding had led him to require; though in such a case we may bewail a wanderer lost, and the fold left with one guardian less, exposed to the attack from without, there is a call for infinitely greater sorrow in the sapping of the whole moral principle, which has at the same time begun its work; in the less acute sympathies with the generous and the great, the more timid, nerveless caution, the less strict code of social integrity and individual purity; and we must lose sight of the outward falling away from a sect of more true and genuine theological thinkers, in the far more lamentable falling-away, which also appeared to be following, from that greater and holier sect, the only sect recognized by the magnanimous and wide-hearted upon earth, the only sect recognized in heaven, the sect of good and upright men.

When a man selects his religious faith and worship from a clear, imperative and long-poised conviction from within, a conviction to which he can appeal in the awful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, then all men should rise up to receive him with honour and affection, as one who has done his

duty; the same whether he has joined, or whether he has gone away from, our peculiar division of the vineyard upon earth. But if his decision has been based on anything less than this, if it has been from mixed or impure motives, if from his lips escape, or in his heart are cherished, the betraying thoughts that speak of the world, and man, and custom, and convenience, then is there a moral wreck preparing on the high waters of life's sea, the hands and the influences that might have once administered succour are no longer within reach, and the signals of its distress are never heard. The heart covers its own bitterness, and there is no one by to probe it.

Having now shown, first the force and character of the law of conscience, as suggested by the words of the Apostle; second, the probability, and indeed almost necessity of its resulting, when allied with the law of liberty, in Sectarianism, in the sense of division into sects; and, thirdly, the solemn responsibility under which it lays individuals in their choice of the part of this Sectarianism to which they will attach themselves,—I propose, in conclusion, and more briefly, to state its special application to ourselves, as Unitarians.

Now though we may disclaim the petty and exclusive spirit, which is the only disgrace of our Sectarian divisions, we cannot disclaim the fact, that we are sectaries and a sect: that we constitute a decided, and at present perhaps the most decided, element of the Sectarianism of the world, that which calls down most animadversion, and challenges most controversy. That is to say, we must confess that we are cut off by ourselves, or by

others, from intimate religious communion and precise religious agreement with the rest of the Christian world. In the same way, the Quakers, the Independents, and the Methodists, are sects: and the Church of England, the Greek Church, and the Roman Catholic Church, are sects. The first three representing those bodies of Christians who have been cut off, or have cut themselves off, from the bulk of their fellow-Christians, for purposes of religious worship and discipline, on grounds which appear satisfactory to themselves; and the second three, representing those who have done the same, on grounds which appear satisfactory to authority. The first are voluntary, and the second are established sects.

In this respect, then, we as Unitarians are in the same predicament as, and in no worse predicament than, the remainder of Christendom. This division or section is no wish of ours; it is our necessity, a necessity imposed upon us by that sacred law of conscience, whose dictates we have seen that we cannot violate in this respect, without injury to our whole moral nature. The form of Christianity in general acceptance says to us, "God exists in three distinct persons, each of whom is God, and each of whom is to be worshipped as God, but the whole not as three Gods. The first man broke the Divine command, and he and his descendants, to the remotest posterity, are of changed nature in consequence, and changed destiny—their nature entirely corrupted, and their destiny eternal damnation. The second person in the Godhead, being an infinite and immortal Being, died, and his blood saves those who believe in its power, from this penalty. The genuine Christian must believe all this, and we frame our creeds, our articles of faith,

our worship, and our religious instructions, upon the basis of these facts ; and whoso wishes to attend on our ministrations with sincerity and profit, must accept and acknowledge these as true."

To this we have but one reply, " We cannot—and we must therefore go elsewhere for that religious light and consolation we require. You have cut us off from your religious communion by these unauthorized exactions. As honest men we are compelled to go out from among you ; for we should only corrupt and degrade ourselves by a weekly assent in our persons and by our lips, to what we believe in our hearts and consciences to be a falsification of religion."

In truth, my brethren, the law of conscience bears upon us with a more accumulated force than upon any other body of Christians in the world. We have no choice. We must give up our conformity or our integrity. And when we call to mind the struggle made two hundred years ago by men whom we are proud to call our spiritual ancestors ; when we picture to ourselves the grounds on which those two thousand men left the homes of their usefulness, their competence and their peace, left them because they would not sully their consciences, by using a form of devotion with some of whose provisions they could not sincerely comply, though with the great bulk of whose doctrines they entirely coincided ; left them, because they would not sully their consciences, by, at the bidding of the State, wearing a particular kind of vestment, bowing towards the east, and kneeling at the Eucharist,—can we fail to be struck at the increased solemnity with which that same eternal law of conscience, which bound them in adamantine folds, applies

to us, whose differences from the established faith are not in mere matters of outward form and discipline, but wrought into the very texture of our spiritual nature? The national belief, as far as it is expressed in forms and articles, is exactly now what it was then; whereas the grounds on which our ancestors gave up their all to be free from it, are multiplied and magnified to their descendants, to an extent almost incalculable. The English Unitarian then, of the present day, is bound by reasons of only too great cogency to that line of conduct in religious profession which compels him to add one element more to the Sectarianism of his country.

But in that Sectarianism, when divested of the narrow spirit that so often accompanies it, he sees no real evil. He sees in it only a beneficial and an imperative exercise of the law of conscience. He has, however, to ask himself, as by the answer hangs another important duty, what is it that gives him this happy and devout conviction? what is it which makes him feel so differently from other people in these varieties of opinion? what is it that enables him to live in peace and charity with all mankind, as far as their religious professions are concerned? what is it that enables him to embrace, with undisguised goodwill, all mankind, (whatever be the sentiments they profess,) Catholics, Protestants, Dissenters, Church-of-England-men, as brethren? It is the creed he holds, it is the opinions that he maintains, it is his truth which makes him free. By infusing those sentiments, then, he will infuse that charity into the breasts of his fellow-men: he will not only preserve his own conscience inviolate, and spread what he believes to be a

diviner truth, but he will take the only steps that can be taken with success, for plucking out its sting from our Sectarianism. For while other men, he must confess, have hearts as warm and kind in all other matters as himself, why is it that they cannot, on this one topic of religion, feel as kindly and charitably, and with as meek religious trust, that all things work together for good, as he? While other men he sees are as virtuous, as good, as humble, perhaps more so, than himself, why is it that they become all at once so full of denunciation and so dictatorial on topics so solemn and so serious as these? What stands between them, and a tolerant, Christian, trusting spirit of charity, that hopeth all things, and thinketh no evil? It is their creed, their opinions—their opinions which teach them that there is but one way to salvation, and that is their own, that those who differ from them will be damned, and those who lead others to do so are guilty of a hateful moral enormity.

The professors of the orthodox system of religion never can generally obtain, whatever by a lax tenure of their own principles they may individually, they never can generally obtain a hearty basis for charity, except by ridding themselves of those opinions which shut up their charity. If the duty of the Unitarian to his conscience is clear, then, his duty to his fellow-men is clear also; and should he still be slower than might be wished to vindicate his faith to the world at large, he at least owes an open and consistent profession of it to those who hold it with him.

The struggle for religious liberty in this country is not

yet completed. The Unitarian has not yet an unmolested and unmulcted liberty from his fellow-citizens to worship God according to his conscience; and though we may appear to be adding to the amount of Sectarianism, by heartily joining in the advocacy of the principles of a particular sect, we are in fact only contending, on special grounds, for that universal liberty of conscience, which can only be achieved by the resolute adherence of individuals to what their own conscience dictates.

The Unitarian, by his decided conduct, is obtaining this liberty for himself, his fellow-believers, and the world; is taking away, not the differences of mankind, but the root of bitterness which alone makes those differences an evil; is avowing the truth as he believes it to have been promulgated by his Master, and confessing before men him who he humbly hopes will hereafter confess him before God. By his undecided and evasive conduct the Unitarian is injuring what he regards as the Truth, and prolonging the existence of the evils of Sectarianism, by perpetuating the struggle for freedom of opinion. He believes that the victory of Truth and Freedom must come; then let him do his part to make it come. Every stone which he passes by unturned in his own day and generation, he leaves a mill-stone about the neck of those who are to come after him. Especially is this the case with all whose influence in their respective neighbourhoods is great. The bigot is, of all animals, the most cowardly. There is no man living, on whose heart wealth and station have such a subduing power. He stands in awe of the man holding these, while his poorer brother he will crush—because he can.

Where Christian charity has not place, the bigotry and tolerance of a neighbourhood towards any offending society, are in exact proportion to that society's worldly strength or weakness. No denomination has more reason to know this than we have. In a town where the society professing our opinions is small and poor, it is treated with an insolence which is never exhibited where its influence is great and its wealth considerable. The principles of a genuine charity are indeed ten thousand times more powerful than such aids as these from wealth and station; for they subdue the heart, while the others only control the conduct. But where the first do not exist, the second help to ward off many a blow that intolerance would else have dealt, and oft afford that shade under which the fruits of religious charity at length grow up to strength and to maturity.

For these reasons it is incumbent upon every man, for the sake of his conscience holding, for the sake of his fellow-believers, to avow his genuine convictions of religious truth; and every man withholding this honest countenance and aid, is perhaps laying up in a napkin the only talent which God has given him, whereby to spread his truth. At the Public Meeting, in the Congregation of Worshippers in Town and Country, City and Hamlet, his presence is required, if for nothing else, then at least to aid those who are contending with intolerance, struggling, in fact, for the possession of their Christian liberty.

You have an opportunity, my hearers, this day, of going forth in messages of kindness and beneficence from this Association;—you have an opportunity now of saying to many a firm yet tried and struggling partaker

of our faith, "Be of good courage, my brother;" of uplifting from their difficulties many a small but trusty band of fellow-believers—of saving their eyes from tears, and their hearts, in their distant solitude, from failing.

THE END.

RICHARD KINDER, PRINTER, GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON THURSDAY, JUNE 8TH, 1843,

BEING

THE EIGHTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

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A SERMON.

Proverbs iv. 7.

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE, GET WISDOM: AND WITH ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING.

Knowledge, my fellow Christians, is the boast and the glory of man. His understanding exalts him "above the beasts of the field or the fowls of heaven," and enables him to render both animate and inanimate nature largely subservient to his interest and happiness. He is endowed, besides, with a capacity for the accumulation of knowledge, which has been denied to all other terrestrial beings. The instincts of the inferior animals admit neither of increase nor of diminution: the revolutions of countless ages have produced no change in their propensities, their habits, or their pursuits. But how beneficently different is the condition of the human race! Not only have individuals been gifted with the power of growing in wisdom as they advance in years, but man communicates knowledge to man, generation transmits it to generation, country interchanges it with country, and the imagination is lost in striving to estimate the wonderful accumulation which, under the blessing of Divine Providence, coming ages may be destined to enjoy. Still, however, although I do most thankfully rejoice in this elevating capacity of improvement with which the benignant Creator has so

bountifully endowed the family of man; and although I do anticipate with unspeakable delight, the steady and progressive increase of wisdom, and virtue, and happiness, I nevertheless most deeply feel that, in the history of past ages, in the present condition of the world, in the natural fallibility of human judgment, and in the admitted waywardness of the human heart, there is quite enough to banish all boyish and enthusiastic dreams of *human perfectibility*.

Ignorance always has been, and, I fear, ever will be, the great enemy of man—the deadliest foe of his holiness and his peace. By ignorance, however, I do not so much mean a want of intellectual cultivation, as a defective perception of the great principles of moral rectitude and social duty. The Divine Records, in speaking of wisdom or knowledge, have never the most distant reference to profound learning or extensive information, according to the estimate of the world: they simply refer to those correct views of duty, and its high sanctions, which tend, above all things, to promote the faithful observance of God's laws. We all know that the highest natural endowments and the most brilliant earthly attainments, have been frequently possessed without virtue, and, consequently, without genuine, practical wisdom: and, on the other hand, we are equally aware that, in many instances, where nature has been sparing of her gifts, and where fortune has denied the means of cultivation, the most valuable of all knowledge—an abiding, operative perception of duty—has been eminently enjoyed. According to the true meaning of Scripture, therefore, wisdom and virtue mean the same thing—the best man being emphatically the wisest man. Thus, when the

Deity declares, by the mouth of the Prophet, that "his people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," and when, in the words of the text, we are told that "Wisdom is the principal thing," and exhorted, "with all our gettings to get understanding," the important lesson which we learn is this—that ignorance of duty leads to destruction, whilst the practical knowledge of its principles and sanctions is the most valuable of all human attainments.

It is evident, however, that this most important species of wisdom is neither innate, nor the offspring of immediate inspiration. On the contrary, it is to be *acquired by the use of means*—by the diligent improvement of those faculties which God has bestowed, and the judicious employment of our various opportunities. Whatever is essential to our well-being, but, at the same time, beyond the reach of our own unaided power to attain, the Great Parent freely bestows upon all his children, with a beneficent and liberal hand. Thus, the gift of life, the capacities of our minds, the constitution of our bodies, the air which we breathe, the light of heaven, the fertility of the earth—all these are the spontaneous bounties of Divine benevolence. But, on the other hand, whatever is attainable by the diligent exercise of our own powers, is never bestowed without the use of means. Thus, whilst the Deity has freely blessed the earth with fertility, the yellow fields of waving grain, "the peasant's plenteous home and cheerful cot," are only the reward of prudent culture and persevering toil. Upon the same benignant plan, the government of the moral world is evidently conducted. The glorious discoveries of revelation, the most important sanctions of duty, and the blessed realities of a future world, have all been made known by the miraculous

interposition of Heaven: but, at the same time, unless we diligently exercise the reason which God has bestowed, in the faithful investigation of the sanctifying principles of that revelation which has been given for the advancement of our temporal and eternal interests, we shall derive no more advantage from all our abundant means of grace, than the slothful peasant would reap from his waste and uncultivated fields. The law of our nature is—"Be up, and doing;" and one of the most beneficent provisions of Heaven is that which connects our highest interests with our most diligent exertions.

These simple, but important truths, are fully acknowledged in all the ordinary concerns of life. The statesman, the lawyer, the physician, the painter, the artisan, and even the humble individuals employed in the meanest cares and drudgeries of the world, are all valued just in proportion to the amount of knowledge which they bring to bear upon their respective pursuits. But although it may be laudable thus to apply the powers of the understanding to the researches of natural science, to the inquiries of the metaphysician, and to all the ordinary affairs of human life, it is little short of blasphemy, according to the fashionable cant of the age, to employ the faculties which God has given us, in the serious and careful investigation of the sanctifying principles of his own divine truth. One is shocked to find revived in the nineteenth century, and in our boasted lands of light and liberty, the loathsome dogma of dark and barbarous ages, that "Reason is the enemy of Faith." Yet it is even so, and that, too, in the very core of most of our Protestant churches. The doctrine of "implicit faith" is inculcated with a zeal and success outrivalling the gloomiest

days of papal usurpation: "carnal reason" is decried as the enemy of man and of God: "moral preaching" has been denounced as "mere ethical puerility, and a more polished method of enforcing the principles of condemnation:" and "rational Christianity" is weekly represented to horrified multitudes, as the parent of infidelity and all abominations! The success of these crafty and canting denunciations has been truly deplorable—especially amongst that portion of our species, whom, for the noblest and most beneficent purposes, the Deity has rendered peculiarly susceptible of religious impressions. Benevolent in their nature, confiding in their disposition, devotional in their spirit, possessing a portion of amiable enthusiasm in all their affections, and too little versed in the hollow selfishness of the world to suspect the solemn declarations of men who wear a face of sanctity, it is not in the least surprising that so many, even of "the excellent among women," should shrink from that free exercise of their own understandings which, as they are seriously assured, must result in the inevitable destruction of their immortal souls. Neither is it wonderful that so many, under such influences, should too readily adopt the popular faith, which assumes to be especially honouring to God, exalting to the Saviour, and conducive to the best interests of the human race. Hence, the prevalent horror of reading any book, or hearing any preacher, or listening to any conversation unsanctioned by the character of modern orthodoxy. Hence, too, the entire suppression of all religious inquiry, and the unhappy prevalence of irreligious uncharitableness amongst the highest evangelical devotees. The serpent of delusion has again crept into Eden; the fairest lineaments of

a gentle nature have been effaced ; and hearts which, in their native humanity, would sigh over the transitory sorrows of earth, are so withered by the blighting influence of a false theology, as to contemplate without a pang the everlasting burning of millions ! The *Index Expurgatorius* of the *Vatican* never shut out heretical publications more effectually from the eyes of the faithful, than the exhortations of our self-styled evangelical preachers, of all churches, exclude from the pale of their flocks the plain and sanctifying truths of Unitarian Christianity. Under this enfeebling influence, the very idea of inquiry awakens undefinable alarms in gentle bosoms ; and the bare insinuation of its being possible that they might change their present opinions, fills them with anxiety, if not with indignation. How common is it to hear from the lips of truly amiable persons (abundantly rational and inquiring upon all other subjects,) such declarations as these :—" We are entirely satisfied with our faith, we shall read none of your books, we shall listen to none of your arguments, we should consider it quite a sin to doubt the truth of any opinion which we now entertain, and we are determined to live and die with our present blessed views, ' the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are Christ's.' " Urge upon these worthy persons, in reply, the possibility that they may be in error, through the fallibility of human judgment, and propose, like Philip, " to reason with them out of the Scriptures." Do this, and you are determinedly stopped upon the instant : " We shall not reason upon the subject : the sacred mysteries of religion are to be believed, not scrutinized : the faith which sustained so many martyrs at the stake, and has carried so

many saints to heaven, is quite sufficient for us !" Thus it is, that the dupes and the enthusiasts of all sects, whether Catholic or Protestant, discard the exercise of reason, prostrate their understandings before the authority of churches, and mistake the obstinacy of human prejudice for the firmness of Christian faith. Well, then, might the prophet say, " in the olden time," " My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," when even in our own days of boasted enlightenment, voluntary ignorance is thus lauded as the handmaid of truth, and the exercise of reason denounced as the enemy of religion !

And yet, my brethren, if there be any subject on which the free and unbiassed use of reason is more important than upon any other, or, indeed, upon all others, it assuredly is the paramount concern of religion, on the proper appreciation of whose principles and duties our dearest interests, in time and in eternity, so materially depend. Even in our lowest earthly pursuits, we can only calculate on success through the prudent and persevering exercise of the rational powers which God has been pleased to bestow ; yet, the vast majority of Christian men seem to consider, that the boundless blessings of an eternal world may be secured, yea, and best secured, by neglects which would involve us in earthly ruin and earthly shame. This general avoidance of inquiry, upon the all-important subject of Divine Truth, cannot fail to distress those who feel and know, as we do, that, without the due exercise of reason, the Gospel of Christ would be of no more value than the Koran of Mahomet, and that " the Sun of Righteousness " would convey no more moral light to our minds than the sun of the firmament conveys of natural light to the eyes of the blind. To

say, therefore, that "reason is the enemy of faith," is virtually to impugn the very authority of the Gospel; for if its doctrines cannot stand the test of inquiry, they are unworthy of God, and must be unprofitable to man. The faith which is not founded upon due investigation is, in reality, nothing more than the baseless fabric of prejudice or superstition. Whilst, then, our arrogant or deluded evangelicals lay claim to the "understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge," without the previous exercise of thought—whilst they sneer at rational religion, and thereby discard the internal evidences of Christianity, which are, beyond doubt, the best and the most convincing—I tell them, plainly, that the revelation of a God of Wisdom must necessarily be addressed to the understanding of man; and that, although reason is and ever will be the deadliest foe to the unscriptural dogmata of Churches, to the wild dreams of the enthusiast, and to the audacious assumptions of men over the conscience of their brethren, it is, at the same time, the only solid foundation of a permanent and efficacious faith.

When we read the page of history, however, with an attentive eye, although we may experience sorrow, we cannot feel surprise that the people of God should so long have suffered "for lack of knowledge," or that a blind, unreasoning faith should still be the object of special commendation. Through all ages and in all countries, authority has been chiefly exercised by the few, who, well knowing that their selfish domination, their monopoly of power, could only be perpetuated by keeping the multitudes in ignorance, have strenuously laboured to prevent any more light from entering their house of bondage than was absolutely necessary to the

successful prosecution of their toils. This melancholy fact will be equally proved by a reference to the rulers of States and Churches.

The history of the world scarcely supplies a single instance where the Government of any country has, in good faith, endeavoured to bestow the advantages of a sound, untrammelled education upon the great body of the people. In illustration of this position, we need not refer to the late despot of Austria, who gravely informed the learned Professors of a University that "their duty was, not to trouble his subjects with literary theories and vain philosophy, but to inculcate obedience to his laws." If we take the very best of European Governments, (Prussia, perhaps, excepted,) we find the despot's principle practically observed, though not openly avowed. In Ireland, the great mass of the people were not, for centuries, permitted to receive even the rudiments of education, save in such wretched pittances as were doled out to them by the enemies of their country and their creed. No Roman Catholic master was tolerated in the land; and, at one period, it was penal even for a Catholic parent to attempt the instruction of his own child! You may perhaps imagine, however, that, under our "New System of National Education," all is sound and impartial; and I firmly believe that it was so designed to be. But the late Government wanted either the wisdom or the courage to establish schools where the children of all denominations might have assembled together, in perfect harmony and on a perfect equality, to receive a substantial *Secular Education* alone—leaving religion to be taught elsewhere, as it ever should be, by their pastors and parents. Instead of pursuing this rational course, they

unhappily yielded to the cant about "a religious education," now so fashionable amongst all parties, and which means nothing more and nothing less than the inculcation of the narrow, soul-contracting, uncharitable peculiarities of sects and churches, and not the grand, expansive, sanctifying, benevolent, universal principles of the gospel of peace. What has been the result? Why, they sowed the dragon's teeth, and the land is bristling with sectarian spears. Instead of "a united education," so eminently desirable in a country so long misgoverned and so much distracted, we have, in consequence of weak, though well-meant concessions to party leaders, Catholic sectarianism ascendant in the South, and, with a few exceptions, Presbyterian and Catholic sectarianism contending in the North, whilst the great body of our Episcopalian Protestants hold themselves entirely aloof from a system which they are not permitted exclusively to control for the advancement of their own views, secular and theological. With a costly and colossal system of education, designed to be "*national and united*," the admission of what is misnamed "religious instruction," into the schools, has driven the various denominations far more widely asunder than they were in former ages; whilst the gall and wormwood of political hatred have been infused into the overflowing cup of sectarian animosity!

Turning from this melancholy view of my native country to the educational history and present state of England, I am disposed to think that, although you fared somewhat better in name, you have not been much more fortunate in reality. Your Dissenters, if I mistake not, were for a long period, like our Catholics, entirely precluded from teaching; and, even until this hour, no general

impartial system of national education has ever been propounded by Government. Individuals, from time to time, effected some good; but it is well known that the efforts of Joseph Lancaster, who gave the first great impulse to the cause of popular education in this proud metropolis, were viewed with vast alarm by almost the entire aristocracy and established clergy of the land. The instruction of the masses, untrammelled by creeds and catechisms, threatened "the utter extinction of law and order;" but, as the current of public opinion in favour of popular enlightenment still rolled onward with increasing volume, and became too broad and too deep to be openly resisted, "the power and piety of the land" have been devising means for diverting it into a channel where "the established guardians of all the religion and morality of the country" may be able to restrain and regulate it according to their own peculiar views of national advantage. Nobly has this attempt to trample upon the sacred principles of religious liberty been hitherto resisted—honourably have the Dissenters of all denominations united in repelling the implied insult that no one of their communion is intelligent enough or faithful enough to be employed in the education of the people—magnanimously and successfully, I do believe, will their exertions be continued; but, after this great effort against a common and gigantic foe, I do fear that, in forgetfulness of the great principles for which they have contended, they will break up their powerful combination by paltry sectarian feuds, and thus lose the finest opportunity ever enjoyed by any people, of *demanding* from their rulers a system of *united secular education*, suited to the wants of the country, without reference to churches

or creeds, in the teachers, the pupils, or the business of the schools. Such a system alone, being founded on the basis of strict justice and impartiality, can secure permanent harmony and substantial instruction; and bitterly will the people of this land, ere long, lament their folly, if, yielding to the general cant about religious education, they shall permit a mighty structure to be reared upon a wrong foundation, which they may never afterwards have the power to overthrow. Religious education, in its proper sense and proper place, no man can estimate more highly than I do; but, in a country where all denominations are tolerated, and ought to be on a perfect equality, the creed of no church should be placed in the ascendant, and the creeds of all churches, simultaneously inculcated, would produce a confusion outrivalling that of Babel. "Education without sectarianism," therefore, should be the battle-cry of every man who desires to secure for his country the permanent blessings of civil and religious liberty.

When we turn from the humbler to the higher classes of society, we do not find that much more has been effected for the advancement of sound, practical, elevating knowledge. Your great, aristocratic schools, and richly-endowed Universities, stand aloof in their cold and monkish darkness, whilst all the world has been advancing around them. Enthralled by intolerant statutes, poring over the unprofitable volumes of heathen Greece and Rome, and neglecting almost everything calculated to prepare men for the rational pleasures and important duties of the world, they have become the last strongholds of bigotry, exclusion, and determined hostility to popular instruction and popular rights. I am, there-

fore, almost disposed to rejoice that Dissenters have not been admitted within their walls; for the very atmosphere is full of contagion, and "evil communications" too generally "corrupt good manners." I cheerfully admit that many admirable men, happily constituted by nature, and nurtured in the hallowed circle of domestic purity, have escaped untainted from these foul influences — men exalted in rank, but more elevated in sentiment—men of sterling private virtue and incorruptible public principle —men of enlarged views and generous sympathies—men of unquestionable patriotism and the most disinterested exertions. But these are only the happy exceptions to the general rule—the bright stars in the dark vault of night; and, whenever and wherever the march of liberty is to be impeded, or the work of intolerance to be advanced, the gloomy hosts of your great Universities rush forward with impetuous zeal, and, too frequently, with overwhelming power.

Leaving these things, should we attempt to estimate the importance attached to knowledge by our civil rulers, from the honours and emoluments conferred upon genius and erudition, we shall find that wisdom has ever stood exceedingly low in the favour of Courts and Senates. Titles have been heaped upon the ignorant, the sycophantic, and the base; millions have been squandered upon the sordid instruments of private profligacy and public crime; but what philosopher has been ennobled, what man of true genius and proud independence has been adequately rewarded? *Lancaster*, the pioneer of popular education, and *Priestley*, of myriad intellect, the enlarger of science, the friend of liberty, the fearless advocate of truth, the idol of private life, and the

ensample of all the virtues—these men, who did honour to their country and their kind, were compelled to seek, in a land of strangers, an asylum for their hoary heads, and a grave for their worn-out bodies, whilst the worthless minions of power basked in the sunshine of royal favour, and transmitted honours and emoluments to their posterity. We need not wonder that knowledge has made so little progress in the world, when genius, and learning, and virtue were often doomed to pine in a garret or rot in a dungeon, whilst ignorance, and folly, and vice were privileged to recline upon the couches of palaces and batten upon the spoils of nations! True, indeed, some improvement has of late years taken place; the spirit of the age has, to some extent, been caught by our rulers; a few trifling, yet honourable pensions, have been conferred upon some of those to whom we are indebted for solid instruction or rational amusement; and yet all the literary pensions of the kingdom would not, in the aggregate, rise to the amount of a single leviathan sinecure in the halcyon days of former reigns.

But *Churches* have been still greater foes to knowledge than even *States*. The priests of all religions have been notorious for their ambition and love of power, as well as for their enmity to civil liberty and freedom of conscience. I speak of them, of course, in the *aggregate*, freely admitting that in all countries and in all churches many honourable exceptions might be found: but that man must close his eyes against the records of history, and resist the testimony of his own observation, who does not confess that the clergy, when acting in masses, and countenanced by the civil power, and unrestrained by the better feelings of the people, are pre-eminently

fond of domination. What is the evident tendency of all authoritative creeds and articles of faith, but to suppress inquiry, to supersede the Bible, to ensnare conscience, and to produce a degrading, heartless uniformity of *profession*, not of faith?

In accomplishing such objects, these creeds have, unhappily, been but too successful. They early corrupted the pure doctrine of the Gospel: they almost extinguished the light both of science and Christianity in the middle ages: they clung like a poisoned mantle around the early churches of the Reformation: and they still enthral the principal Protestant communions of Europe. Truly, it is an humbling and afflictive sight to see thousands of ministers and millions of people submitting to human dictation in the concerns of the soul, and professing a uniformity of *faith* amidst every diversity of *opinion!*

In my native country, the great body of the Presbyterian population who were for ages the intrepid standard-bearers of civil and religious liberty, have tamely submitted, within the last fifteen years, to become the mere slaves and instruments of a paltry clerical oligarchy —of men who are scarcely agreed, even amongst themselves, in a single principle except a common thirst for unrighteous domination. Students, ministers, people, have equally surrendered their most sacred Christian privileges; and, were it not that I was so much mingled in the distressing scenes which have resulted in the almost total prostration of the ancient and manly spirit of Presbyterianism, as to render it invidious on my part to enter upon details, I could make your hearts thrill with an account of the disgraceful proceedings which

have subjected the church of my fathers to a despotism as vulgar as it is insolent and oppressive.

This melancholy suppression of knowledge, this detestable havock of conscience, this shrinking away into the darkness of past ages, are justified by the hackneyed and hollow plea of being guided by "the wisdom of our ancestors—of travelling in the good old way—and going to heaven as our fathers went before us!" It is very strange that we never hear of "the wisdom of our ancestors," either in religion or politics, except when it is adduced to sanction some act of tyranny and oppression. They were miracles of wisdom, it would seem, in all proceedings which restricted civil and religious liberty; and those who applaud their sagacity have, doubtless, a deep sympathy with their feelings: but is it not remarkable that we never hear them praised for any act of generosity and kindness? The truth is, the perpetual cant about ancestral wisdom, which stuns our ears in the harangues of bigots and intolerants, is nothing but a puny attempt to cover the deformity of their own principles and acts with the mantle of antiquity. Were they pursuing a fair and manly course, they would take all the merit to themselves; for, in reality, they have no more respect for the wisdom of ancestors than for the wisdom of alchemy. There is not one of them so ignorant as not to know that, in many things, our ancestors were the very opposite of wise. In the concerns of religion especially, they were far from being truly enlightened. Nor is this any matter of surprise. Just emerging from the midnight gloom of the dark ages, their eyes could not endure the full blaze of the sun of Divine Truth. Superstitions still clouded their minds, prejudices still clung

around their hearts; and, although they had burst the galling fetters that bound them, they were utterly unable to make a free use of their limbs. They were, therefore, gratified to meet a number of their old forms, and ceremonies, and dogmata, like early friends, under more agreeable circumstances; and quite satisfied to be freed from the tyranny of the Pope, they tamely submitted to enjoy the name of liberty, under the iron despotism of Kings, and Parliaments, and Bishops, and Presbyterian Synods. Hence it is that, even in the present age, a large portion of the old leaven is still mingled with the doctrines and forms, and institutions, of almost every Protestant Church in Christendom. The simple fact is, our ancestors never thoroughly understood, or, at least, they never completely acted upon, the genuine principles of Christian liberty. They freed themselves from *one* Master, only to become the slaves of *many*: and, for my own part, were I compelled to submit my neck to *some* yoke, I should much prefer the defined and regulated tyranny of a *single* despot, to the capricious, heartless domination of a selfish and arrogant clerical cabal. Away, then, with the wisdom of our ancestors! That which is praised as the evidence of their intelligence—their tame acquiescence in the usurpations of churches—is only a proof of their folly. I do not wish, however, to detract from their just merits; we unquestionably owe to some of them a debt of lasting gratitude and veneration, for having laid the solid foundations of the mighty temple of civil and religious liberty; but the task of completing the glorious structure, where the whole family of man may assemble to worship in charity and peace, has devolved upon their descendants! It is no

reproach to the memory of our ancestors, to allege, that we excel them in wisdom ; but it would be a lasting disgrace to ourselves, if, with the accumulating knowledge of ages transmitted to our care, we were no wiser than our progenitors.

It is chiefly, however, in vindicating the corruptions of religion, and the tyranny of churches, that men praise the *errors* of our ancestors, under the title of *wisdom*. It is the boast and glory of our age, that in arts and sciences, in literature and refinement, in industry and commerce, in everything which has a tendency to sweeten and adorn society, we have far outstripped all preceding generations : but in religion, it seems, "in the grand concerns of an eternal world," our only safety consists in clinging to the sanctified errors and abuses of former years. Indeed, even to *hint* at the *possibility* of advancement in religious knowledge, is considered by our exclusive evangelicals as nearly akin to blasphemy. "What!" says one of this class, "attempt to improve religion—to amend the word of God!" This is the ignorant or crafty cant, which so admirably imposes upon the weak and the timid. They are taught to view every man as an audacious intermeddler with the prerogatives of heaven, who calls upon them to exercise their reason, and endeavours to make them better acquainted with the will of their Creator. No one, at least of our creed, ever meditated the impiety of attempting to amend the Laws of Revelation, any more than to improve the Laws of Nature. Both are from God—both, therefore, are perfect—both immutable. But, although we dare not pretend to *improve*, is it not our bounden duty to *investigate*, and our highest interest to *understand* the Laws of

our Heavenly Father? Did Copernicus and Newton pretend to improve the laws of our solar system? No: they merely illustrated facts and principles already in existence, and pointed out the wondrous and magnificent arrangements of Almighty Power. Did Priestley and Davy assume to alter the principles of chemical science? No: they only developed the inherent properties of matter, and applied to purposes of practical utility what had previously been the unimagined secrets of nature. Did Bacon and Locke affect to change the constitution of the human mind? No: they simply endeavoured to render men more intimately acquainted with their own intellectual and moral being—with those glorious faculties and divine energies which place them, amidst this scene of things, at the head of created natures. Did Worcester and Watt pretend to call into existence the amazing power of steam? No: they only pointed out the means by which this mightiest of natural agents has been so regulated and controlled, as to baffle the tempest and the billow, to multiply indefinitely the products of human skill, to facilitate the happy intercourse of people and nations, and to open the way for increasing comfort and improvement amongst the whole family of man. In the names and labours of those illustrious men, we glory and rejoice—not because they presumed to alter or amend the primary laws of matter or of mind, but because, in the successful investigation and development of those great principles, they at once manifested the wisdom and beneficence of their Creator, and conferred incalculable benefits upon the world.

Yet it is alleged to be the height of arrogance and impiety to free religion from the dust and cobwebs, the

mysticism and absurdity, of dark and barbarous ages! An orthodox expositor, indeed, may lawfully set forth the principles of his assumed evangelicism, and travel in a beaten circle until he again arrive at the very point whence he started; but wo be unto him who, in the solemn investigation of Divine Truth, may be led to deviate a single hair-breadth from the prescribed line of established articles and creeds! We read of those who, in former times, "hated the light because their deeds were evil;" and may we not, without the imputation of uncharitableness, apply a similar observation to men who dread the candid investigation of their religious opinions? Can conscious truth be alarmed at the prospect of inquiry? Can conscious rectitude be afraid of the most searching scrutiny? Can doctrines founded upon the immutable principles of Divine Truth lose any of their loveliness and power from being measured by the unerring standard of the Divine Law? Does it not, on the contrary, tacitly acknowledge some deformity in a cause, when its advocates seem ashamed to expose it to the light of day? We proceed upon a principle directly opposed to all this. We court the strictest scrutiny of our opinions: we have nothing to conceal, nothing to keep back. We are thoroughly convinced that ignorance and darkness are our greatest foes; and we abidingly believe that, as the brain-born terrors of night vanish from the minds of the weak and the timid with the returning dawn of the east, so will all superstition and error eventually disappear before the glorious light of knowledge and of truth.

Instead of striving, however, to diffuse the cheerful light and genial warmth of a holy and rational faith,

thousands who clearly perceived the absurdities of orthodox pretensions, and lamented their unhappy influence upon the religious and social condition of mankind, too long permitted them to pass with silent reprobation, as evils so glaring that they must eventually effect their own cure, without the disagreeable excitement of controversy. The same spurious liberality is still the failing—nay, I shall speak out—is still the shame and the crime of too many enlightened Christians in our own days. The prophet, of old, was commanded to "cry aloud, and spare not; to tell the people of Israel their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins:" and the time is now come, brethren, for the honest dissection and exposure of this puny and mawkish sentimentality amongst ourselves, which assuming the sacred name of Charity, confounds all churches and all creeds—cants in its own way (for there is a cant of liberalism as well as of intolerance) about moderation, and forbearance, and living in peace—and thus becomes scarcely less the enemy of truth and knowledge, than even bigotry itself! The ignorant, the fanatical, and the hypocritical, contend with unwearied zeal for the very "fringes and cornices" of their unscriptural and mystical systems, whilst vast numbers of our rational Christians, who assume the credit of being peculiarly liberal and gentle, allow the very citadel of truth to be assaulted, and yet look idly on, as if the best of causes would defend itself, or were not worth defending. Had our blessed Saviour pursued this course of silent deference to the assumptions of dominant error—this plan of bowing in virtual apology for the temerity of holding the principles of unpopular truth—the "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," would never have been rebuked

—the sanctimonious "devourers of widows' houses" would have remained undenounced—the internal foulness of the "whited sepulchres" would not have been exposed—the selfish perverters of Divine Truth, and the persevering violators of God's Moral Law, would never have been held up to the merited reprobation of the world. Disguise the matter as we may, under the fair robes of moderation and charity, our disinclination to disturb the repose of error does not so much emanate from a generous forbearance with the failings of others, as from a timid selfishness on our own part, and the want of unbending Christian integrity. Under such influences, we too frequently impress the mark sterling of ore upon the basest metal. Our shrinking from the danger of worldly reproach or inconvenience, we call moderation; our indifference to sacred truth, we dignify with the name of charity. I do believe, that we sometimes delude even ourselves in these concerns—that we mistake the true nature of our own designs and feelings. I am therefore most anxious to guard you against the besetting sin of our sect—and especially of its more affluent members—the confounding of indifference to God's Truth with the rational charity of the Gospel. Believe me, brethren, indifference and charity are not synonymous terms: they are as opposite to each other as darkness and light, as earth and heaven.

Indifference is content to see error triumphant in the world, to bow before it in the sanctuary from the influence of fashion, and to worship habitually against conviction and conscience for the sake of local convenience or worldly interest. In the education of the young, it causes parents to boast of a liberality in religion, which leaves the minds

of their children entirely blank as to the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, whilst they should dismiss an instructor who failed to inculcate definite views of languages, literature, or science. Nay, it often causes Unitarian parents, of ambitious minds and worldly tendencies, to place their children, thus designedly neglected, amidst those very influences which they know to be calculated to draw them into the vortex of error; and this, too, I firmly believe, in many instances, with the degrading desire and hope that they may adopt the convenient errors of a worldly faith, instead of the unfashionable truths of rational Christianity. Language is too feeble to express the loathing which arises in the breast on contemplating this disgraceful paltering with the highest interests of their children—this causing them to neglect "finding the pearl of great price," in order that they may collect the worthless paste and counterfeits of the world. Such men are ever clamouring for moderation, "crying Peace, peace, where there is no peace," censuring the honest zeal of their friends, and palliating the hypocritical intolerance of their enemies—following in the rear of every onward movement, and giving out bad omens—calling upon their pastors to teach religious truth, without contrasting it with religious error, as a painter might be requested to present all the beauties of a glowing landscape without light and shade—canting about the evils of sectarianism and the loveliness of a catholic spirit—and ever ready to invent some hollow plea for the opportune desertion of unpopular truth. Happy would it be for the cause of human improvement were all such characters at once to withdraw from our churches. *With* us, but not *of* us, they are more dan-

gerous than open enemies, paralyzing our present exertions, and sure to forsake us in the end.

How different is all this from the *Charity* of the Gospel—that charity which does not confine benevolence to the mere relief of corporeal wants, but looks upon the removal of error from the mind, and the subduing of unworthy passions in the breast, as the holiest work of beneficence in which a finite creature can be engaged. Condemning no man for unavoidable mistakes, inflicting no temporal penalties upon human fallibility, denouncing none as the heirs of everlasting perdition on account of an erroneous theology, but believing, on the contrary, that the Great Shepherd will gather many sheep from various folds, and that the humble, the upright, and the virtuous of every sect and every land shall be brought to see the salvation of the Lord, genuine charity, nevertheless, "rejoiceth in the truth." It sees nothing so lovely, nothing so beneficent, nothing so sanctifying, as the unadulterated religion of the Gospel, whose precepts it imprints upon the minds of the young, as their chief defence against the temptations, their best support under the trials, and their only protector against the dishonest, time-serving, and hypocritical spirit of the world. In contending with error, "the weapons of its warfare are not carnal but spiritual;" it is zealous without bitterness, instructive without dogmatism, and persuasive without denunciation. Ardent in pursuit of truth, and "boldly declaring the whole counsel of God," it stands erect in conscious integrity, and scorns to bow in apologetic concession before the dominant, the popular, and the profitable "inventions of men."

Such is the "charity which thinketh no evil, but

rejoiceth in the truth," viewing that truth as an emanation from the wisdom and benevolence of Heaven, which must necessarily tend to the promotion of permanent and extended good, whilst it mourns over error as the unhappy offspring of human weakness, or selfishness, or crime, which cannot fail to be productive of misery and evil.

That spurious liberality, however, on which I have been commenting, attempts not merely to cover its real indifference to the extension of God's kingdom, with the borrowed garb of Christian charity, but also endeavours, with an air of great solemnity, to excuse itself and impose upon the world, by the utterance of certain crude sophisms which it promulgates as the dictates of reason. Its primary ground of self-vindication is this—

"The knowledge of *absolute truth* is unattainable, owing to the feeble and finite capacities of man; and, consequently, as we can never be *quite certain* that we are ourselves perfectly right, whilst others are assuredly wrong, our very zeal may be only carrying us more rapidly forward upon the paths of error. Besides, it would imply a defect either of wisdom or benevolence in the Supreme Being to suppose that He had left any doctrine *disputable* which was really *essential;* and, therefore, the controverted points of theology which separate churches and lessen charity, cannot be matters of much importance."

Now, my brethren, it is wonderful how ingenious men are in deluding themselves, when the deceit falls in with the current of their interests or inclinations, and how much more readily they assent to a pleasing sophism than to an unpalatable truth. The premises set forth in

the preceding propositions are incontrovertible — the absolute knowledge of truth *is* unattainable, and God is undoubtedly too wise and too gracious to have left the essentials of religion to be subjects of dispute. But premises may be true, and conclusions erroneous; a text may speak the verity of God, and a sermon the absurdity of man: and thus, whilst we readily admit that absolute truth may be unattainable, we repudiate the inference that there is *nothing certain in religion*, or that truth and error are so intimately commingled as to be scarcely distinguishable from each other, and almost of equal value. Let us test the argument of the time-server in this matter, by some parallel instances in other concerns. Perfect knowledge is confessedly unattainable: the finite powers of man cannot completely fathom the depths of nature; nor can any individual mind concentrate within itself the accumulated intellectual treasures of the world. But is all knowledge, therefore, without value? Is there no difference between civilized man and the untutored savage—between the enlightened philosopher and the uninstructed peasant? Is there nothing certain, nothing beneficial, in arts, in science, in literature, in all those varied results of intellectual cultivation which sweeten and adorn society? Do we not, on the contrary, feel, my brethren, that, imperfect as our knowledge may be, we nevertheless owe, chiefly to it, our personal respectability, our moral elevation, our social happiness? We never commit the absurdity of telling our children that, because they cannot learn everything, it is of no importance whether they be instructed in anything; nor do we place them in business, or devote them to a profession, without the preparatory training which is essential to

success. No: it is only in religion, the science of holiness, the preparatory training for eternity, that we hesitate as to the importance of fixed principles, and leave their minds convenient blanks, on which the hand of accident, or fashion, or interest, may write the creed of the world.

Let us take another illustration of the principle advocated by our lukewarm or timid liberal. It is unquestionably true that we do not know the nature of the Supreme Being; for, "none by searching can find out God; none can know the Almighty unto perfection." But is there not a wide distinction between Theism and Atheism—between the knowledge which, though confessedly imperfect, still presents to our view a universe of order and beauty, regulated by supreme wisdom and governed by supreme power, and the godless, hopeless theory of a universe created by accident and governed by fate? Defective though our knowledge must be, we assuredly would not exchange our deep and devout convictions of a Father's presence, and providence, and mercy—our feeling that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being"—our unhesitating trust that, under his Divine control, "all things are working together for good"—we would not, brethren, surrender these elevating, sanctifying, sustaining sentiments, to cast our eyes upon an atheistic waste, to live under the protection of chance or fate, "to be without God in the world," and without hope for eternity! And yet, to my mind, there is scarcely more difference between Theism and Atheism than between Gospel truth and Calvinistic theology. Gospel truth! How sublime are its glorious principles, in their very simplicity! Through the ever

blessed Messenger of Divine Grace, it confirms to us the fundamental doctrine of all true religion—that "the Lord, our God, is ONE LORD." But, it does much more: it represents this one God, not merely as an abstraction to be admired, or a ruler to be feared: it brings Him down to our comprehension and affections, as a distinct object to be reverenced, and as a FATHER to be loved. In Him "we behold concentrated all the glories of the universe" to awaken our adoration; but He comes especially home to our bosoms, our wants, and our hopes, in his Divine impartiality, as equally the Father and the friend of all his children. We learn that, "of a truth He is no respecter of persons"—that he loves not by a party, or a sect, or a country—but that "in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." Thus feeling and thus believing, we rest secure under the shadow of His wings; we trust in his bounty to sustain, in his mercy to pardon, in his over-ruling providence "to make all things work together for our good;" and, when we turn to our fellow men, we can look upon them *all* with affection and with hope, as those who, through varied scenes of discipline and trial, shall eventually be prepared for mansions of peace "in their Father's house!" And is there no difference, my brethren, in moral influence and intellectual satisfaction between these cheering views of God's government and man's final destination, and those presented to our contemplation in the gloomy volume of Calvinistic divinity? In that fearful work of "man's device," we behold a God composed of heterogeneous parts and conflicting elements—dooming millions upon millions of his rational offspring, by his own

irreversible decree, to unavoidable sins and interminable miseries — hating without crime, and loving without virtue—imputing guilt to the innocent, and righteousness to the guilty—sapping the very foundation of human responsibility, by virtually annihilating all distinction between holiness and vice—and, finally, as consummating his triumph and manifesting his glory, by the infliction of inconceivable and everlasting torments, upon the vast majority of the creatures of his hand! And yet there are those amongst us so transcendently liberal, so sublime in charity, as not to point out, even to their own children, the broad distinction between Calvinism and Christianity, because they are not *certain* that their own better views are entirely consistent with "absolute truth!" Do such individuals strengthen their justification by the further plea, that "the belief of controverted doctrines cannot be essential to salvation?" Not in the least; for, whilst it may be admitted that worthy men, although entertaining opposite views of disputed questions, may, nevertheless, be hereafter united in a common salvation, it does not follow that any man can be in a state of security, and at the same time totally indifferent to the propagation of those opinions which he *himself* believes to be consistent with Divine truth. Infallibility of judgment we cannot possess; but sincerity of heart is within the reach of all: and, in my estimation, the man who, from worldly views, shrinks from the open profession and zealous promulgation of those doctrines which, in his honest conviction, he firmly believes, "has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Yes, infinitely worse; for unbelief may be involuntary, and consequently venial; but the insincerity

which causes a man, under false pretences, to palter with his conscience, and shrink from the avowal of what he believes to be true, is a wilful and degrading crime.

Conscious, however, of the hollowness and instability of the plea which I have just exposed, our dishonest Liberals endeavour to vindicate their indifference to the promotion of truth, by urging as a second ground of defence, "That no man will be either saved or condemned by his *abstract religious opinions*." Here, again, we have a verbal truth involving a dangerous sophism, and leading to a mischievous conclusion. It is indubitable that abstract opinions, or, in plainer words, opinions existing merely in the mind without influencing the conduct, are not of the slightest importance in the economy of salvation. But where are *such* opinions to be found? There is not, my brethren, in existence an abstract religious doctrine. Seeds produce plants, trees bring forth fruits, the glorious sun of summer clothes the earth with abundance, the icy blast of winter freezes the bosom of nature, and, in the same connexion of cause and effect, opinions lead to practice. All principles, whether good or evil, have their inevitable results. How absurd is it, therefore, in rational men, to talk of abstract religious doctrines, knowing, as they must know, that erroneous theories have not merely defaced the native beauty of the Gospel, but led also to the systematic rejection of its plainest precepts, and the open violation of its holiest laws! What awful consequences have arisen from the abstract maxim of Ignatius Loyola, "That heresy must be repressed at all hazards, as the *end* will sanctify the *means*!" Clothing themselves in the mantle of this anti-Christian theory, the basest passions of human nature

trampled for centuries upon the conscience of man and the authority of God—casting into dungeons, torturing upon the rack, immolating by the burning pile, the noblest spirits of earth, the most devoted followers of the Redeemer! Even when outraged humanity recoiled from the sight of those giant atrocities, and the better sentiments of the laity restrained the ferocity of the clergy, civil pains and penalties, equally inflicted by Catholics and Protestants, were perseveringly employed to crush the spirit of liberty and truth. And has the Jesuit's maxim ceased to operate, because the gloomy days of imprisonments, and confiscations, and burnings, have passed away; because the more tolerant sentiment of the age has erased all penal enactments from our Statute Books? No: the same spirit is still in existence, still rampant in churches and in society, though happily restrained in its most pernicious exhibitions by the salutary power of human laws. Times and circumstances have changed, but the stern and unlovely features of bigotry are unaltered. There is no calumny too revolting for the lips or the pen of a thorough-paced evangelical, when the character or faith of Unitarians is to be assailed. Atheists, deists, rejecters of the Word of God, soul-destroyers, and "deniers of the Lord that bought us," are amongst the gentlest epithets fulminated from the pulpit and the press, against those whose great crime is their unshaken adherence to the Bible, as the only infallible rule of faith and duty, and their undivided allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the sole King and Head of his Church.

Nor is it in relation to Unitarians alone that this fell spirit exercises its unhallowed influence. It is truly an

all-pervading evil; it mingles in all the concerns, and poisons all the fountains of social life. How often have we seen it destroying the peace of families, and fulfilling the prediction of our Saviour, by "setting the son against the father, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law," and literally "making a man's foes to be those of his own house." In the ordinary concerns of the world, and especially in small communities, it too generally impedes the successful prosecution of business, interferes with professional employment, stands in the way of honourable promotion, and causes men to be valued and trusted, not in proportion to their intellectual and moral attainments, but according to their theological creed. To such an extent is this unhappy spirit manifested in my own distracted country, that our highest evangelical professors will not employ a Unitarian or a Catholic, even in the menial cares and drudgeries of the world. And when we turn to the social intercourse of life, to those circles in which men were wont to cherish the better sympathies of their nature, and to forget their individual anxieties and pursuits, in the enjoyment of generous hospitality and enlightened converse, we too generally find the society of the private dwelling as sectarian and exclusive as that of the worshipping assembly, and as little calculated to expand and Christianize the heart. The same spirit tends to undermine the very foundations of morality, by representing *faith* as the sole agent in man's salvation, and looking upon a *holy life*, not as the end which religion is designed to accomplish, but merely as an outward evidence of correct opinions. Let a man's life be as pure as the unsunned snow of the mountain—let his beneficence be confined by no limits

but the extent of his worldly means—let him, in humble imitation of his great Master, go about "continually doing good"—and, yet, he is only upon the downward path of destruction, if his faith be "one jot or one tittle" too large or too narrow—whilst the sensualist, the oppressor, the hypocrite, the dishonest dealer, if he only belong to the true fold, and "make long prayers," is assuredly upon the upward ascent to heaven! I well remember having once heard a Protestant nobleman, whilst presiding at a Bible Society, point out in glowing terms the saving efficacy of faith, and the irresistible power of Divine Grace. He first of all described a character degraded by continued sensualities and utter forgetfulness of God, until his audience were disgusted by the picture which he had drawn; and then bowing down in all the vain humility of saintship, exclaimed, "Behold him in your presence: behold the man of sin: yet, by the grace of God, I am what I am!" The applause was loud and long continued: the wilful misdeeds of the loathsome sinner were forgotten, whilst the involuntary faith of the pompous convert was hailed as the sole agent of salvation!

Under the baneful influence of such views, we often find the very seat of judgment perverted, to sooth the terrors of guilt. The hardened criminal, whose hands have been deliberately imbrued in the blood of innocence, standing to receive the awful sentence which has been awarded to his transgression, is gently and gravely assured, "That although the justice of man must doom him to execution, he may, nevertheless, obtain the everlasting happiness of heaven, by trusting in the atoning merits of the Redeemer;" as if the sacred blood of the

Saviour had been shed to secure impunity to the most enormous guilt, instead of being poured forth "to redeem us from all *iniquity*, and to purify us unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of *good works*." When the final hour of this unhappy sinner has arrived, we find the same system of delusion continued upon the scaffold, and the same encouragement held out to other criminals by some Calvinistic pastor, who assures him, in language similar to that used in Glasgow, not many years ago, "That he is about to pass into glory!" Yet the same tongue which thus unhesitatingly pronounces the beatification of the most heinous guilt, would pass the sentence of everlasting perdition upon the purest child of humanity, who should fail to adopt some irrational and unscriptural creed invented by his erring brother worms! Nay, my fellow-Christians, so blighting are the influences of these "abstract opinions," that they not merely pervert the judgment, but harden the heart, and cause men to look complacently, I fear, in many cases, with satisfaction, to the everlasting burning of millions, including their dearest kindred and friends, for the sole crime of cherishing a faith at variance with their own.

Through the degrading influence of this fell spirit, the whole Unitarian body of England and Ireland are, at this moment, threatened with "the spoiling of their goods." The houses raised by our ancestors and ourselves, for the worship of "the one living and true God"—the funds accumulated for the instruction of the young and the sustenance of the widow and the orphan—the homes of our pastors, long consecrated as the peaceful scenes of domestic happiness—the very graves of our parents, our partners, our children, our friends—yes, brethren, all

those things which are most hallowed in our religious associations and our human affections—*all* are to be swept away from their rightful owners, and transferred to our ruthless calumniators and persecutors, under the operation of an infamous penal statute, unless the justice and humanity of our legislators shall rescue us from the fangs of a Calvinistic priesthood! No men declaim more vehemently than they do, about truth, and justice, and charity, and "doing unto others as we would that they should do unto us;" none wear graver faces, make longer prayers, or talk more loudly in praise of the Bible; none would more cordially doom a needy or uneducated wretch to transportation or the gallows, for the commission of a paltry theft,—and yet, with up-raised eyes and tones of sanctity, they stand impatient for the time when they may share the plunder of their fellow Christians, to the amount of hundreds of thousands of pounds; and when, more cruel still, they may drive us from our altars, our homes, and the very graves of our earthly kindred!

Talk not, then, my brethren, of "abstract principles of religion," for they are nowhere to be found. Attempt not to screen your indifference to the sanctifying truth of God, under the hollow plea of the innocuousness of error. Be honest men in the concerns of eternity, as you are upright men in the concerns of the world. Do not palter with your own consciences—"be not deceived, God is not mocked." You know that human errors, that false doctrines, that the perversion of God's word, have produced nearly all the persecutions, nearly all the iniquitous laws, nearly all the enormous crimes, nearly all the social evils, under which the world has so long groaned, and by which it is still so largely afflicted. Do not, I beseech

you, through any motive of worldly convenience, or interest, or fashion, or fear, allow yourselves to be diverted from the fair and onward path of Christian sincerity; do not permit your children, through a base connivance on your own part, to be drawn into the vortex of error; do not sit tamely by, to witness the triumph of a gloomy and injurious theology, through the influence of untiring zeal and pecuniary sacrifices on the part of its adherents, whilst you withhold from the cheering and sanctifying doctrines which you inwardly believe, that zealous countenance and liberal support which you are bound, both in honor and in duty, to bestow. Do not suffer that very temporal independence, with which a gracious Providence has blessed you, to become the ground of your deserting his faithful service in the sanctuary; nor lend the weight of your stations and names to the perpetuation of doctrines which, in your secret souls, you consider to be dishonouring to God and injurious to man. Remember that the Gospel has not been given to sinners, that its principles may be held and professed in subserviency to the vanities of the world, but, on the contrary, for the express purpose of counteracting those vanities, promoting religious sincerity and moral purity, and thereby raising men to the ever-during happiness of heaven.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood in what I have now said with regard to the pernicious influences of erroneous opinions, as desiring to cast a sweeping and indiscriminate censure upon my Calvinistic brethren. Thousands of them I cheerfully acknowledge to be as pious, amiable, humane, and excellent persons, as ever adorned the Christian profession. Many such, I am proud to

reckon in the number of my most valued kindred, my steadiest friends, and my worthiest fellow-citizens. But I am not therefore to shrink from the avowal of truth, or the exposure of error; I am not, in open defiance of God's injunction, "to call evil good, and good evil;" I am not, through any fear of giving offence, or any mawkish liberality, to admit that the excellent men, of various churches, who entertain erroneous opinions, have become excellent through the *influence* of their errors, whilst I feel convinced that they are only good men *in spite* of their errors, owing to the countervailing influences of amiable natural dispositions, a judicious education, or the favourable social position which they occupy in the world. Some one, I believe Dr. Channing, has well remarked, "that were men to see nothing, to hear nothing, and to think of nothing but their creeds, we might be able to estimate the comparative value of conflicting opinions, by the conduct resulting from them." But men do not live in such abstraction: they are variously constituted by nature, and they are constantly surrounded by a thousand various agencies which insensibly mould their principles and characters. Of these agencies, the creed is but one; and we can seldom calculate the precise power which it exercises, apart from other influences. Of this, however, we may rest assured, that, exactly in proportion to its divergence from the truth, it becomes an instrument of evil, and in the ratio of its accordance with God's law, it becomes an instrument of good. As a virtuous education, therefore, generally operates as a powerful agent in the formation of an estimable character, so do correct views of divine

truth generally tend to restrain evil passions, and to promote holiness of heart and life.

If such, then, be the necessary practical results of opinions, where their influence is not counteracted by other causes, *True Charity* should teach us to use all the rational and Christian means in our power, for the removal of error and the diffusion of truth. Feeling as we do the blessedness of a rational faith, and rejoicing in the power of a Christian hope, would it not augment our happiness, and is it not our bounden duty, to extend the influence of that faith and hope, through which we are enabled to look up to our Heavenly Father with unbounded confidence, and to our Blessed Redeemer, "as the Saviour of all men;" whilst we can look around with cheerfulness and affection upon our brethren of the dust, and rejoice in contemplating the final consummation of God's unfailing mercy, in the endless happiness of His entire rational creation? But, my brethren, we can only extend our faith by the extension of knowledge. Our system knows nothing of mysteries, or supernatural impulses, or implicit belief. It speaks to the understanding, and through the understanding to the heart. It addresses man as a rational and accountable being, and abhors "the sacrifice of fools"—"the worship of an unknown God."

As an additional and powerful motive to the use of our best exertions for the extension of a rational and scriptural faith, we ought to consider its eminent tendency to arrest the progress of infidelity. In every enlightened country, the frequent result of an erroneous theology is the entire rejection of revealed religion.

Men, unhappily, too seldom look for Christianity where they ought to seek it—in the Bible. Instead of this, they view it through the distorting medium of human creeds; and, thus, they too often reject the wisdom of God, by confounding it with the folly of men. In illustration of this melancholy fact, it would be invidious to refer to the principal nations in the south of Europe, where the men are almost universally unbelievers, and the women mere formalists and dupes. From these, I turn to Scotland, the boasted land of reformed Protestantism and superior education. And what do we there find, amidst all the parade, and pomp, and ceremony of religion—amidst a formalism unequalled in any other country upon the earth? Why, we find exactly what we should expect to find, where the education of a people, naturally inquiring and intelligent, is far in advance of the creed of the Church—we find more infidelity than in all the rest of the British empire, and far more, in proportion to the population, than in any other Protestant country of Europe. Yes, and it pervades all ranks—having, as is well known, nestled in the professor's gown, and found shelter under the judge's ermine, and run through all classes, down to the labourer and mechanic. Do I libel the shrewd inhabitants of North Britain, by stating these things? No: for it is not many years since two of their most learned professors lamented, in the General Assembly of the Church, that "infidelity was stalking over the land," and gravely proposed, as a corrective for the evil, a more rigorous enforcement of the very creeds and formalities which had produced it! The Scottish Presbytery of London, in the days of Edward Irving, bore a concur-

rent testimony to the same fact. Speaking of there being "one hundred thousand of the baptized of the Scottish church," in this great metropolis, they lamented that the Scotch congregations had dwindled from ten to five; and that in those five there were not found one thousand communicants! In tracing the proximate causes of this melancholy decline, they dwelt upon the love of pleasure and the pursuit of gain, but especially upon the wide spreading desolation of infidelity. To those who look into human nature, however, all this appears to be only the necessary result of a permanent and irrational creed in an advancing world. We occupy, therefore, at this moment, as Unitarian Christians, having no creed but the Word of God, a position peculiarly interesting and important. Standing between fanaticism on the one hand and infidelity on the other, we must eventually, if honest and zealous, arrest the progress of both. We have certainly done something to Christianize the unbelief produced by Calvinism; and much more could we effect, had we but the men and the means to reap the many fields "which are already white unto the harvest." Calvinism is a yoke too galling to be long endured by an educated people; and our blessed province will be, to stop those upon the downward path of Infidelity, who shall have rescued themselves from its thraldom.

There is still another species of unbelief with which, as Unitarian Christians, we are specially bound to contend —an infidelity far more dangerous than the open denial of the divine authority of the New Testament. Under the guise of Christianity, "it wounds the Saviour in the house of his friends," and "betrays him with a kiss."

Professing to respect the Gospel, it impugns its clearest statements: and affecting to reverence the character of Jesus, it denies the miraculous works to which he constantly appealed as the most convincing evidence of his divine mission; thus virtually impeaching his veracity and holding him up to the world as an impostor. The apostolic writings are treated, if possible, with less respect, whilst a mystical and pompous jargon usurps the name of Christian instruction. Now, it is not with infidelity in the abstract that I quarrel; for as no man can force his convictions, simple unbelief I look upon as merely a misfortune: but I do contend that men should not fight under false colours, and call themselves Unitarian *Christians*, whilst it does not appear that they consider the evangelical and apostolic records as possessing any divine authority at all, and seem to look upon the Saviour as, at best, but an amiable, self-deluded man, if not a wilful deceiver. Against such views, assuming the name of Unitarian Christianity, we are bound to protest. They may be able and eloquent speculations, abundantly attractive to those who understand or think they understand them, which I do not; but assuredly they are not Christianity. When our children look up to us for "the bread of life," to strengthen them on the journey of immortality, shall we, instead of nurturing their spirits with the plain and edifying truths of the Gospel, feed them with the husks of German Rationalism? When the aged speak to us of eternal hopes, and rejoice that "life and immortality are clearly brought to light in the Gospel," shall we tell them that, after all, the Gospel is only an allegory—that the Evangelists were inaccurate historians—that

Christ wrought no miracles—that the alleged Conversion of Paul is a mere fiction,—and that the writings of the Apostles cannot be relied upon, either as to facts or doctrines? Brethren, in such things, let us have "neither lot nor part:" our people want something better than "vain philosophy"—something more substantial than sceptical speculations—something to enlighten their minds, to improve their hearts, to amend their lives, and to give them steadfast hopes beyond the grave. The times in which we live demand honest speech and honest action. We cannot compromise our principles from the fear of offending enemies on the one hand, or worthy but mistaken friends on the other. We must walk straight forward upon the open path of duty—rejoicing that we live in auspicious times, when the spirit of inquiry is abroad, when the sifting of principles has commenced, and when judicious and persevering exertions cannot fail to accomplish permanent and extended good.

It is only, however, by compact union and steady co-operation, amongst the friends of truth and liberty, that the cause of Christian knowledge and Gospel charity can be effectually promoted. Individuals can do little in their isolated spheres, but when combined in friendly associations and animated by a generous sympathy, they acquire both courage and power. Such Associations have been most potent instruments in the hands of error. Keeping up a constant excitement in the public mind, and working upon the multitudes by a kind of spiritual Mesmerism, they have largely contributed, in most churches, to the ascendancy of pernicious doctrines: whilst *our* Associations are, for

the most part, of recent origin, and have been too generally languid in their spirit and feeble in their exertions.

The Society, on whose behalf I am this day about to solicit your support, is one of the best in its constitution, and certainly the most enlarged in its sphere of operations, of any which the Unitarians of these countries have established. Embracing in its objects the diffusion of Christian knowledge through the agency of books and tracts—the pecuniary support of weak congregations in England and Scotland—the protection of civil rights—and the extension of rational Christianity in other lands, it is eminently entitled to the countenance of the whole Unitarian community. I am aware that there exists in many districts an undefined fear of *centralization*; and this may perhaps, to some extent, account for the poor and scanty subscriptions from all your provincial towns: but, in this case, the fear is altogether groundless; for whilst the management is metropolitan, whilst the committee and principal officers of the Association gratuitously devote a large portion of their valuable time and attention to its concerns, and whilst almost the entire funds are contributed by the citizens of London, not one shilling is expended here for local purposes, save the small amount absolutely required for working the machinery. A Society established and conducted on such generous principles ought to be supported by every friend of rational Christianity in this country, and supplied with ample means for extending its field of operations. Instead, however, of being thus sustained, its funds have experienced a gradual diminution, dispiriting to its conductors, paralyzing to its exertions,

and far from creditable to a Christian denomination, distinguished for affluence and respectability. There must be some mistake in this matter: the claims of the Association cannot have been adequately pressed upon public consideration: its objects and its management must have been misunderstood.

You will pardon me, then, I am persuaded, my Christian brethren, for the plainness with which I have spoken on many subjects, and for the earnestness with which I now entreat you to consider the inestimable value of truth, both in its relations to time and to eternity. Must it not fill us all with sorrow, to reflect, how little of our time, how little of our means, we have devoted to the maintenance of our principles—how much to personal indulgence, to vanity, to the pursuits of the world! I entreat you to remember, that you are responsible for the proper use of the ample bounties which a gracious Providence has conferred upon you; and to consider, that by a decent liberality, this day, by contributing what will not curtail a single personal comfort, you will "honour God with your substance," and may become the essential benefactors of your fellow creatures, by extending the virtues and charities of "the life that now is," and preparing immortal spirits "for that which is to come." Believe me, no exertion which we make is isolated; it forms one link in the chain of causes; and a single error removed from a single mind, may, in the wonderful associations of human life, have influences beyond our power of calculation. At all events, we should acquit ourselves to our own consciences, and leave results to God,—remembering it is not merely on public occasions like

the present, but also by our honest zeal and manly integrity in our entire social intercourse, that we are bound to sustain the sacred cause of Divine truth and man's improvement. In pursuing this course, we must expect to encounter innumerable difficulties in the interests of the world, the fashion of the world, the prejudices of the world, the power of the world, the indifference of friends, and the unscrupulousness of enemies: but, to the man of sterling integrity, these obstacles will only act as incentives to greater vigilance, a holier zeal, and more unwearied exertions. Under the providence of God, we cannot despair of the ultimate triumph of Divine truth and Christian charity, over all human error and human passions. The day of this glorious consummation may be far distant—individuals and churches may pass through varied scenes of suffering and probation: but come it will, and come it must, when this great truth shall be acknowledged over the whole earth, that "GOD IS ONE, AND HIS NAME ONE."

Now, unto Him, by whose grace alone we can be "strengthened and established in every good word and work," be ascribed all honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE END.

Printed by RICHARD KINDER, Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey.

ETERNAL SALVATION NOT DEPENDENT ON CORRECTNESS OF BELIEF.

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A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 29TH, 1844,

BEING

THE NINETEENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE.

By WILLIAM GASKELL, M.A.

Ah! mighty God, with shame I speak't, and grief,
Ah! that our greatest faults were in Belief!

COWLEY.

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TO

HIS COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND,

THE REV. JOHN GOOCH ROBBERDS,

THIS DISCOURSE

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

A SERMON.

2 Corinthians iii. 17.

WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY.

It has long been my conviction, and extended observation only serves to strengthen it, that the error which above all others we should be anxious to see uprooted from the Christian world, is that contained in the idea that belief in some particular system of doctrines is a necessary condition of eternal salvation. Though there may be many in every denomination whose feelings rise up in refutation of such an idea, as often as the light of a beautiful character shines upon them from the midst of those who are known to cherish views most widely differing from their own, still it is one which intimately pervades the mind of Christendom, and is but too strongly and mischievously marked in its effects. I am desirous, therefore, of leading you to make it the subject of your earnest attention; and if I can only succeed in this, I feel that I shall do a service to the cause of liberty, truth, and charity.

I.—I see a condemnation of the idea which I would combat, first, in the nature of the Christian records.

I cannot think that the writers could have been content to leave them as they are, so utterly devoid of every thing like system, if, as is commonly supposed, their main object had been to bring men to the reception of a certain set of dogmas. I cannot believe that we should not have found them manifesting a deeper anxiety to place beyond the possibility of doubt or mistake what are the elements which constitute a right faith, if they had had the faintest conception that upon it was to depend the salvation of millions on millions of human souls. Surely we should then have had them doing what many since have been so ready to do for them—laying down with the utmost definiteness and precision, forms of sound doctrine, and distinctly setting forth the awful consequences attendant on their rejection. Instead of encouraging men to "prove all things" and "be fully persuaded in their own minds," we should have had them saying, "Beware of reason, it is a carnal and dangerous power. Trouble not yourselves with inquiry; it may lead you into destruction. Be content to prostrate your understandings before that which we declare. Take it on the warrant of our inspiration, this is the faith which before all things it is necessary that you hold, and which, unless you do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt you shall perish everlastingly." Yes! in place of that particular law of rites and ceremonies, on the world's deliverance from which the great apostle of the Gentiles so fervently rejoices, we should have had substituted a no less precise code of opinions for the observance of the mind, out of the circle of which we should have been

solemnly warned we could only step at our immortal peril. But could the Gospel then have been justly termed "the law of liberty?" Would it not have sought to impose a bondage even heavier than that which it had broken? Nothing of this kind, however, has been attempted by the apostles; and in the very existence of the numerous formularies which have since been devised, we have one of the strongest testimonies to the uncreed-like nature of their writings. So little care have they taken to set forth in a clear and connected manner the several articles of belief, on the reception of which such stupendous consequences are generally imagined to hang, that men, professing to entertain the most undoubting assurance of their inspiration, have not scrupled to do it for them, and to supply what must have been conceived to be defective in their plan. This one consideration alone, especially when viewed in connection with the mode of treatment applied to the errors of the first converts, its freedom from authoritative dictation, and the bestowment of inspired rules of belief, might be sufficient, it seems to me, completely to set aside the idea that man's eternal well-being is linked with any particular form of faith.

II.—I see a condemnation of this idea, again, in the laws which govern the human mind. Let a doctrine be laid down ever so definitely, guarded and explained ever so carefully, in all likelihood there are no two individuals to whom it will be exactly the same. Their different original capacities, their peculiar intellectual tendencies, and their variously-formed associations and habits of thought, will all have their effect in modify-

ing it, so that though they may unite in assenting to the words in which it is expressed, the ideas which they receive from them may be widely distinct. Let us take an illustration. According to the Athanasian Creed, he that will be saved must *think* of the Trinity in the way which it prescribes. As members of the English Church, Dr. Sherlock and Dr. Wallis must have promised so to think of it; yet how far apart were their views—the one holding an undisguised Tritheism, and the other a kind of disguised Unitarianism! We have no reason to doubt but that both were sincere. And can it be believed by any, that simply because language did not convey the same perceptions to their minds, the one may be called to enjoy, and the other become an outcast from the bliss of heaven?

The Protestant assures us that there is no salvation for us unless we reverently bow to the sense of the Scriptures. We ask, *what* sense—*whose* sense? The sense which they have for the child, or for the man; for the ignorant, or for the learned; for the poor in mental endowments, or for the rich in intellectual power? Is it not evident that their sense must be as varied as the minds which seek it—that they cannot present any thing like absolute truth to all? And yet for this imperfection on their part—the unavoidable result of the medium employed, and to be remedied only by constant miracle—souls without number are to be doomed to the dwellings of endless woe!

Nothing, it seems to me, can well be plainer than

that faith is not a matter which is subject to our control; that we cannot believe as we will; that it is evidence alone, or that which we take for evidence, which may command our assent. If then sufficient evidence of the truth of a doctrine be presented to us, where is the merit of belief? It cannot be resisted. Or if, on the contrary, the evidence appear to us defective, where is the demerit of unbelief? It cannot be helped. Why then should the one have attached to it such a glorious recompense, and the other such a fearful doom? Why should the one be crowned as a virtue, and the other be branded as a crime? Surely it must be admitted that the point of merit lies, not in the possession of a correct belief, but in the pains which have been taken to form it—in truthfulness of mind—in the anxiety to discover the holy, the beautiful, the right. If not, it might be that not a few who have devoted their lives to the search after truth—who have been constantly labouring for wisdom, and praying for light—might be placed in an infinitely worse condition than one who has had no cares of the kind, but stumbled by mere accident on juster opinions. Take the case of the celebrated commentator Dr. Whitby. For the greater part of his life, he had been a zealous advocate of the doctrine of the Trinity, but when upwards of fourscore, he drew up a retractation of what he conceived to be his error. He begins with confessing that "when he wrote his Commentaries on the New Testament, he went on too hastily in the common beaten road of other reputed orthodox divines." But "I own," he says, "I am not able to resist the shining evidence of truth;

nor am I ashamed to confess my former mistakes and errors in these matters, after such strong and irresistible conviction, seeing 'all men are liable to error.' And this my retractation, or change of my opinion, after all my former endeavours to assert and establish a contrary doctrine, deserves the more to be considered, because it proceeds, and indeed *can* proceed from me, for no other reason but purely from the strong and irresistible convictions, which are now upon me, that I was mistaken. Nothing, I say, but the love of truth can be supposed to extort such a retractation from me, who, having already lived so long beyond the common period of life, can have nothing else to do but to prepare for my great change; and, in order thereunto, to make my peace with God and my own conscience, before I die. To this purpose, I solemnly appeal to the Searcher of hearts, and call God to witness, whether I have hastily or rashly departed from the common opinion; or rather, whether I have not deliberately and calmly weighed the arguments on both sides, drawn from scripture and antiquity." Now can the veriest bigot to orthodoxy maintain, that for such a change of views, induced by the progress of truth-loving inquiry, this learned and laborious divine, or any one actuated by a like spirit of sincerity, could really forfeit his claim to be regarded as a Christian, or bring into jeopardy his eternal salvation? If he can so maintain, then certainly must he be compelled, at the same time, to maintain, that the Bible alone is not a safe guide, and that from the discharge of an honourable duty—a duty in express conformity with the teachings of Scrip-

ture—a man may bring himself into a worse spiritual condition than he was before; that it might have been better for him never to have obeyed his Lord's injunction to 'judge for himself what was right,' but contentedly and lazily have made over the keeping of his soul to the care of others.

How, too, we may ask in this connection, would it be with one who was just on the point of arriving at a true faith, and had every desire to do so, if, before it was actually attained, he were summoned away by death to another scene? Would the advances which he had made go for nothing? Would his right-mindedness prepare him only to meet the sentence of perdition? Take the case of the Apostles. It is the opinion now, I believe, of the most eminent orthodox writers, that till after the resurrection of our Lord, they were unacquainted with what are so generally regarded as the peculiar, saving doctrines of the Gospel. They certainly comprehended not the spiritual nature of his kingdom. Are we to believe, then, that if on the night of the last supper the spirit of one of them had quitted this world—say of the warm-hearted Peter, or of the loving and beloved John—it would have dropped from the side of heavenly purity and holiness into the black abyss of the damned?

III.—I see a further condemnation of the idea which I am opposing, in the nature of the effects which have resulted from the mission of Christianity into the world. We cannot conceive that, under the good providence of God, it can have failed altogether to accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. But if

that purpose had been to bring men to any certain system of belief, we should assuredly have had reason for concluding that it had so failed. That which has been zealously upheld as the essential, saving faith, at one period, has been anathematized and condemned as a fatal heresy at another; and amongst those who have been most sincere—those who have given every proof which men could do of the singleness of their intentions, and the ardent love which they bore to truth—the most irreconcileable differences of opinion have prevailed. For a long period, Catholicism held almost unlimited sway; would the zealots, who now delight in pouring forth burning invectives against it, and heaping upon it charges of idolatry and blasphemy, maintain that during so many ages the goodness of God was entirely frustrated in its object—that Christianity utterly missed of its end? This they must do, so long as they continue to recognize salvation only in right-believing. They will fail to see how all the while it was doing a saving work, by impressing itself through the senses on the undeveloped mind and rude heart of humanity, calling into exercise its deepest feelings of awe and veneration, shedding a softening influence over its passions and affections, and gradually preparing it for far higher revelations of the splendour of its power, and the glory of its love.

If time would permit, it would not be difficult to show that to the want of that unity of opinion, which on the common view could only furnish a subject for regret, might be traced, if not the continued existence

of Christianity in the world, at least very much of its life and progress. And, amidst all the innumerable diversities of belief which spread themselves around us, take the sincere professors of each, and compare them together, and how little appears the difference in the great features of their characters! They all agree in loving God, in loving Christ, in loving their fellow men. They all agree in anticipating a day of judgment, when sin shall meet its fearful reckoning, and goodness find its issue in unspeakable glory. They all agree in reverencing the volume which enshrines their faith, in binding its beautiful lessons on their memories, and filling their minds with its sanctifying spirit, and opening their hearts to its cheering words of promise and its soothing accents of hope. And can it be, that amongst any of those who seem to approach so nearly to one another here, such an awful distinction as is sometimes represented is really to be made hereafter? Can it be, that merely for conscientious differences of belief some shall never know a miserable moment, nor others a happy one, through an existence without end?

IV.—Every one who has made the Scriptures his serious study will admit that there are many things in them which are hard to be understood, and, recollecting what different ideas they have suggested to minds equally animated by a desire to discover the truth, must be constrained to acknowledge that the chances are great against his committing no mistake. Is it to be imagined, then, that our tender and merciful Father in heaven, who "remembereth that we

are dust," can have left us to choose our faith from the midst of these uncertainties, and have suspended an eternity of anguish on an erring choice? Can such a view by any means be reconciled with the declaration, which there is no misinterpreting, "God is love?" Must it not be infinitely more inconsistent with every idea which we form of the benignity of his character, than if he were represented as sending forth his children to find some distant point, while their eyes were blinded, and their feet were wandering among the most fearful precipices? Surely it must be seen that there is something very like impiety involved in such a belief. Surely it must be felt that, read with this in the mind, the Gospel must be any thing but glad tidings of great joy.

Notwithstanding the declaration of the Westminster Confession of Faith—a confession which takes its tone from the sterner accents of the old dispensation, rather than from the lips which breathed the prayer, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do;" that it is a doctrine "very pernicious and to be detested," that "men, not professing the Christian religion, can be saved in any way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess,"—I cannot bring myself to suppose that there are any, who, in their inmost souls, do believe that a compassionate God can have laid myriads of his creatures under the sentence of perdition, simply because his providence had so cast their lot that it was impossible for them to gain a knowledge of the truth.

If any do so believe, not for the whole world would I have my mind darkened with their conception of Him, in whose hands creation's destinies rest. Beneath its gloomy shade, every bursting feeling of gratitude, every springing emotion of love, every blessed germ of trust and hope would shrivel up, and wither away. Instead of thinking of God as "not willing that any should perish," I should have to imagine him as eager to condemn. Instead of looking to heaven to see a Father's face, I should cast my eyes on the earth, and walk ever in fear of the black scowl that was over me. But if this is not to be believed, then, according to the common idea of orthodoxy, it had been better for many, who have sat at the feet of Jesus with an earnest wish to learn the right—and amongst them some of the noblest spirits that have walked this world, such as Milton, and Newton, and Locke, and Priestley, and Channing—that they should have remained in all the darkness of heathen ignorance. The great gift of God's grace has proved to them only the gift of perdition. What they took to be a robe of righteousness, from the hand of love, has turned out to be a poisoned garment which has treacherously eaten into the life of their souls.

Oh! can any one, who at all considers these things, entertain a moment's doubt, that if such a consequence as that of eternal salvation had been made to rest on correctness of theological opinion, the mercy of God could never have abandoned us to aught so shifting and uncertain as the decisions of our own fallible understandings, but would have appointed some living

representative of Christ, some truth-inspired ruler of faith, against whose claims to authority not a suspicion could be breathed, and to whose unerring judgment we might submit our own without a scruple or a fear? Orthodoxy necessitates Popery. The former without the latter becomes a cruel mockery of man's weakness, and a foul calumny on God's goodness.

I cannot here go into an examination of the few passages in the Christian records which are thought to countenance the idea I am assailing, or it would be easy to show either that the errors condemned are such as imply an infidelity of heart, or that the condemnation to which they are subjected, by no means necessarily includes what it is generally assumed to do. Nor is there any occasion that I should. The Scriptures are their own interpreter, and make this point abundantly plain. Without any qualification from points of belief, our Lord declares that "the pure in heart shall see God," and that "whosoever shall *do* the will of his Father who is in heaven, the same is his brother, and sister, and mother." What the apostles, too, evidently sought most of all to produce was the subjection of the soul to the moral power of Christ—a believing with the heart unto righteousness. And wherein lies the mighty magic of an assent to a series of propositions however true? Whence springs its exclusively saving efficacy—its eternal merit? Not in the mere assent; for without sufficient evidence it would be irrational, and with it it becomes unavoidable. Not in the mere correctness of the propositions; for what, in the sight of Omniscience, must be the highest mental accuracy

that can ever pertain to man, save a weak glimmering of light deep buried in clouds of ignorance! But that holy trust in God—that child-like reliance on Him, which is ever ready to hearken to the voice of his love, and to follow the leading of his hand through light and through darkness, through calm and through storm—that life-glorifying and death-conquering faith which Christ displayed—this has nothing mystical in its power to save. It brings man to surrender up his being unreservedly to the guidance of infinite wisdom and infinite goodness—to walk with God as with a Father, beneath the shield of his Omnipotence. What truer safety, what higher salvation can be found than this?

I cannot tell how other Christian teachers may be affected by the idea which I have been combatting, but I feel that if it were mine I should never dare to venture an opinion on any of the great controverted points of belief. I should say to myself, "How can I know whether the words that I utter, though uttered in deepest sincerity, may not be the means of conveying a totally false impression to the minds of my hearers, and so of setting them on the way to destruction? I will hold my peace."

In results similar to this, I mark the first evil tendency of such an idea. It is but a natural effect, that the intellect, enclosed, as it were, in a fiery circle, should be fearful of putting itself freely forth, should be rendered timid in its inquiries, and shrink from letting reason carry out principles to their full extent. We know too well what is the consequence of linking

worldly considerations with any particular system of belief; they lead men uninquiringly to repose in it; incline them to see only the proofs which will serve to establish it, and to look away from whatever makes against it. And will not something similar be the effect, when the bribe which is held out is the most glorious, and the penalty which is denounced the most terrible, that the heart of man can conceive? To this has it in no small degree been owing, that men have so often been ready to part with their birthright, and make over the charge of their souls into the hands of others; to this, that they have left themselves to be led blindly by priestcraft at its will; to this, that they have slavishly bowed down their reason in subjection to human creeds; to this, that discussion has been stifled, and opinions have been dissembled, and doubts have thriven in secret, and Christianity has been prevented from coming freely and fairly into contact with the spirits of men. And what is the consequence? While other paths, in which intellect may exert itself with freedom, are illumined continually with fresh bursts of glory from minds of the highest order, theology alone, the noblest of all, remains dim and obscure; and those who dare to imagine the real brightness which belongs to it—those who know that the most beautiful language of the stars above and the earth beneath, the most wonderful revelations of the abysmal depths of science and the full heart of poetry, are but a telling forth of the ways of the beneficent Creator, but 'a speaking of God'—those who, unfettered by the chains which clank round the minds of the multi-

tude, venture with humbly-daring souls to exercise their understandings here as elsewhere, and strive to enlarge evermore their conceptions of the Infinite—are too often treated as though our religion were the worship of some veiled idol of deformity, and not the adoration of a pure Spirit, whose essence is truth. Surely this is neither the way to do honour to Christianity, nor to bring out its full grandeur and power. How can we expect new light to be thrown upon points at present obscure, but which may come forth like stars in the dark canopy of heaven, under the contemplation of some glorious mind, if such minds are to be shackled with curses, and their path is to be hemmed round with threats of damnation—if, because in their earnest searchings after truth they chance to wander away from the beaten track of popular views, they are to be branded as outcasts from the fold of Christ, and among the everlastingly condemned, by those who are hugging themselves in the stagnant and unstirred depths of traditional opinion, and who tremble when a breath moves over the face of its waters, though it might be to them the prelude to a bright illumination. Surely this is the way to engender a spirit the very opposite of that which the apostle Paul seemed anxious that his converts should breathe, when he bade them "prove all things," and "in understanding be men."

Another evil effect of the idea which I have been opposing is its tendency to give false notions in regard to Christian excellence. It makes a true belief the one thing needful. It buries the soul of faith in a grave of verbal obscurities. It turns away the thoughts

from moral goodness to fix them on mental correctness. It sets light by the spirit of Christ in comparison with the propositions of a system. It leads men to dread an error in doctrine more than a heresy in life, and to find the best scope for their zeal in eagerly propounding and defending a certain set of opinions. "Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God," are as nothing in its view to the holding fast to a few speculative points. Using the Gospel as a means of highest spiritual training—of building up a holy and elevated character—fades into insignificance in its sight, before the employment of it as a storehouse of proofs for the defence of some favourite article of a creed. What plainer evidence can be required that such is its effect, than the totally different treatment which is often accorded by numbers to some thoroughly Christian-hearted individual, in whom they can discover no fault save that of disagreeing with them in opinion, from what they give to one who has scarcely any recommendation but that of holding the same system; or than the manner in which, during the closing moments of an ill-spent life, the great all-in-all is deemed to be secured by a fear-extorted profession of some mysterious belief, and a tone of triumphant exultation encouraged where the utmost that would seem warrantable would be a breathing of humble hope?

Another evil effect of this idea is, that it leads to arrogance and exclusiveness, and poisons the sweet charities of life in that which should be their purest source. The penalty overhanging erroneous belief is so tremendous, that no wonder men dare not imagine

that they can be mistaken. It is a thought too fearful. They naturally come, therefore, to assume something of the tone and bearing of infallibility—to lose sight of the fact that they are equally disciples with those who most widely differ from them, and have no better right to decide what the Master teaches than they have, and can arrive at no fuller assurance of the truth.

It might sometimes make one smile, if it had not something too pitiful in it, to see the manner in which men, under the influence of this idea, will set up their creed, and call on others to bow down their minds before it, and then begin indignantly to charge with "pride of reason" such as feel unable conscientiously to obey. They seem to be totally unconscious that the "pride of reason" is with themselves; that they are in effect saying, "We cannot be wrong; what we believe must be God's truth; only agree with us, and you will infallibly be right." But dreadful is it to think how, from this idea, men have been led into the condition of those to whom our Lord addressed one of his parables, "which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and *despised* others!" Dreadful to think how they have ventured to usurp the prerogative of Him who alone searcheth the heart, and presumptuously decided that the denial of their opinions could proceed only from inward corruption or wilful blindness! Dreadful to think how they have dared to limit the boundless mercy of the Universal Father to such alone as could bring themselves to worship their idea of truth, and have made their thoughts of vengeanc reach beyond the grave! Dreadful to think how in

their endeavours to enforce a law of belief, they have violated an infinitely higher law, the law of love; and made the Gospel, instead of a bond of brotherhood, a source of unnatural estrangement, and bitter upbraiding, and cruel strife! Even yet, in our own enlightened land, how much is this the case! We find the Romish church denouncing woe for ever on the souls of those who venture but a few short steps from the pale of her communion, and take refuge in the bosom of the establishment. We find this, again, catching the very echo of the rejected hierarchy, and lifting up its threatenings of undoubted perdition against such as have the boldness to question its decrees. And we find Dissenters too, regardless of the anathemas which have been hurled against them by both, learning the same high tone of rebuke, and issuing forth no less authoritative and fearful condemnations against those who, merely exercising the same liberty which they have exercised, feel constrained to dissent from them. What is to stop the threats, and arrest the curses which are thus sent flying in every direction? What to hush the angry spirit of contention which is thus awakened, and bring back something like that state of things when, instead of hating, and reviling, and persecuting, it might again be said, "See how these Christians love one another?" What to hold out the promise of a realization of the Saviour's sublime idea of one universal church, pervaded by one holy and benevolent spirit—the spirit of his own heavenly life? Nothing whatever, as it seems to me, can possibly do this, until

the truth be distinctly and thoroughly recognized, that no one can peril his eternal salvation by any opinions to which, in the free exercise of his reason, he is conscientiously led; that a man may be ever so much in error, and yet not be guiltily wrong; that

> "From every faith,
> As every clime, there is a way to heaven."

In the effects which seem naturally to result from the opposite idea, we have at once an additional evidence against its truth, and a strong appeal to us to do what we are able towards lessening its prevalence. I can scarcely conceive of a view more at variance with the generous spirit of the Gospel; and, if I do not much misread the history of freethinking in this country, it is one which has been the means of turning away from a thorough consideration of the claims of our holy religion many minds that were noble and true, and that would have done honour to the cause of Christ. Placed over the gate of the temple by human hands, they read this superscription, 'Ye that enter here, leave every reasoning power behind. Believe without doubting what the priests ordain, or everlasting destruction be upon your heads!' They could not consent to be thus coerced into belief; to be driven, like sheep, into a narrow pen, no choice or liberty allowed them; and they turned away disgusted from the fold in which, if fairly thrown open to them, they might have found rest and refreshment to their souls.

It is the just remark of a philosophical mind, (Sir James Mackintosh,) that "every impediment to the utmost liberty of inquiry or discussion, whether it

consists in the fear of punishment, in bodily restraint, in dread of the mischievous effects of new truth, or in the submission of reason to beings of like frailties with ourselves, always, in proportion to its magnitude, robs a man of some share of his rational and moral nature." Inasmuch, therefore, as the idea on which we have been dwelling seems peculiarly to bring such impediments in its train, it becomes us, as we love our race and are anxious for the progress of Christian truth, to do our utmost towards the confutation and extinction of that idea.

Believing the doctrines which we hold to be true, we must believe that all which they require for their success is a spirit of real inquiry and fearless reflection. But so long as men can think so unjustly of the God who guides their ways, as that He can ever regard allegiance to the noblest power which He has bestowed as treason to Himself, and permit involuntary error to be the means of leading to destruction, it appears to me we may despair of seeing such a spirit awakened. So long as this is the case, will they naturally seek to buttress up their minds with authorities, and tremble to plant a foot beyond the well-paced round of orthodoxy. Reading the sacred record, as it were, on the verge of a fathomless abyss, they will eagerly cling to the hands of those who most confidently promise to keep them from falling.

It seems to me utterly vain, too, to expect that there can be any thing like a fair comparison of opinion, a calm and dispassionate weighing of reasons, while one of the parties believes that his peculiar views

make him a favourite of heaven, and every time he looks the other in the face sees branded on his brow 'a child of hell.' Protestant principles may be professed, but the sting of Popery will remain. In words infallibility may be disclaimed, but in reality it will be assumed. No matter how long, and patiently, and earnestly we may have sought for the truth — no matter how humbly and reverently we may have sat and listened at the Master's feet—no matter how ardently our souls may have yearned to be filled with his spirit, and conformed to his likeness—we shall have our fellow-disciples, instead of calmly reasoning with us on the ground of equality, angrily mounting into the judgment-seat to denounce us as no Christians, and ever ready to treat us as a kind of outcasts from the religious world, to whom no sympathy is to be shown, and with whom no terms are to be kept.

But turning from every selfish consideration, what nobler office could we ask—what higher mission could we desire, than that of bearing among contending sects the olive-branch of peace—than that of striking down the walls of partition which stern creeds have interposed between the hearts of brothers, and convincing them that there is a faith which, despite every difference of belief, can work by love? Were it only a pebble-stone that we were able to remove out of the path over which the angels of God are to pass on their errands of mercy, it were a service that we should not despise. Smoother and swifter would their passage be. How much more then with such a mighty stumbling-block as that which we have been contemplating!

We are associated together for the promotion of what appears to us a purer form of Christianity than generally prevails. We have neither bribes nor threats to bind us to our views. We are free to follow reason and conscience wherever they may lead—free to turn our eyes adoringly to the light from whatever quarter it may break forth—and we wish our fellow-men to enjoy the liberty wherewith we are made free. But we need not, therefore, fall into that false liberalism which represents all opinions as pretty much alike, and strives to skin over the wounds produced by differences of faith, instead of trying to pluck out their venomed sting. Surely there may be a holy zeal for truth without any such unholy dogma as that which lies at the heart of orthodoxy, and infuses bitterness into its veins. We cannot believe that the acceptance of our views is essential to acceptance with the great Father of spirits, but we do believe that a purer faith, consistently carried out, will lead to purer practice; we do believe that there is much in prevailing systems which has a tendency to veil the true splendour of the Gospel—much which is false of God and man, and stands in the way of that free and perfect love of both, which is the fulfilling of its law. We cannot maintain that salvation is inseparably bound up with our doctrines, but we do maintain that there is salvation in them from many idle fears, from many baneful restrictions on freedom of thought, from many exclusive feelings, from many tenets that are calculated to lay a load of doubt on the understanding, and of bitterness on the heart. We do believe and maintain that our's

is a system which is peculiarly fitted to give "not the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And our duty, therefore, is clear. We have to adorn that system, and to recommend it to others. Let us endeavour to be true to the position in which Divine Providence has placed us. Let us feel it as a high distinction to be joined to that glorious company who in every age have been called to do battle for the right. And though the ignorant may censure, and bigots may curse, and the corrupt may sneer, let us calmly and resolutely labour on, sustained by the faith that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, but one day assuredly appear in the establishment of his kingdom of truth, and peace, and love.

THE END.

R. KINDER, PRINTER, GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

ON THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF MAKING THE WORD OF CHRIST OUR SOLE RULE AND GUIDE.

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A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 14TH, 1845,

BEING

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A SERMON.

John viii. 31, 32.

"THEN SAID JESUS TO THOSE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED ON HIM, IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD, THEN ARE YE MY DISCIPLES INDEED.
"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."

This is a most important and interesting passage of Scripture; one that well deserves our best thoughts, and most serious attention. If we believe that Jesus Christ came from God, expressly commissioned and endowed by Him, to teach us the way of truth and salvation; if we believe, also, that we possess in the New Testament, the true and authentic record of the word of Christ, *then*, most assuredly, the declaration which our Lord here makes, is vested with a deep and significant meaning, and carries with it a practical application to the state of the Christian Church, of the greatest importance at all times.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

If our Lord thus spake to those of old who believed on him, so does he still speak to us, and to all his disciples, with the same intent, through every period of his Church. There is a living power in the word

of Christ, which continues for ever the same, and which the progress of time can neither impair nor destroy. On the contrary, the fluctuations of human opinion, and the changes constantly taking place in society, only serve to confirm and illustrate its truth, in a still higher degree, by teaching us to make other and nobler applications of it to the growing wants of our nature, and by unfolding more of its divine spirit and meaning, for the improvement of the world, and for the happiness of man.

The present distracted state of the Christian Church, for instance, and the endless divisions of opinion prevailing therein, must tend to convince every thoughtful and impartial mind, that our Lord's declaration is as important and applicable *now*, for warning and instruction to his disciples, as when it first proceeded from his lips. The history of Christianity, during the eighteen centuries of its eventful existence, reflects a light upon this very subject, so strong and striking, that whoever contemplates it with attention and candour, can scarcely fail to learn some of the many important lessons it is teaching every day, in such an impressive manner.

For had the disciples of Christ been content to receive and abide by his word, in its divine purity and simplicity as he delivered it, and as it has been recorded for our learning; had they been firm and strong in their faith in its sole efficacy and all-sufficiency, to guide them aright through every difficulty in their course, to sustain them in every emergency and trial, and to supply all the spiritual wants of their condi-

tion; had they with singleness of heart and purpose, faithfully employed all the best aids in their power, for understanding and obeying its divine truths,—*then* we have every reason to believe that many of the evils and calamities that have laid waste the Christian Church, from age to age, would never have existed: and that the power and influence of the gospel, on the minds and hearts of men, and on the general condition of society, would have produced a far brighter and happier state of things than the one it is now our sad necessity to behold and lament over.

But alas! the disciples of Christ have *not* been thus content to abide by the simplicity that is in him, and to continue in his word alone. They must be wise above that which is written, and must add words of their own, to improve upon the divine word of their great Master. They have imposed a grievous burden of vain traditions and contradictory creeds, on the minds and consciences of men, too heavy to be borne, and which, instead of promoting peace and union, have brought forth only strife and discord, and all uncharitableness.

Hence, therefore, the multiplied evils we behold! The different nature of principles, like the different characters of men, will surely be made known, sooner or later, by the different effects they produce. "Ye shall know them," says our Lord, "by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"—Matt. vii. 16. In the spiritual as in the natural world, the certain efficacy of its laws is constantly made manifest in

every impressive form, by the good or evil consequences of our conduct; for as we have sown, even so are we also required to reap.

Thus in departing from the pure and sacred word of Christ, breathing peace and love, or in adding to that word, his disciples have committed a great and grievous error, injurious alike to their own best improvement, and to the true prosperity of his Church. They have also been compelled to reap the deadly fruits thereof, from time to time, in their mutual divisions and animosities, their "strifes of words," their bitter reproaches and persecutions against each other, and in the innumerable other evils that have sprung up from the same sadly fruitful source. Thus in the forcible words of the prophet, "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."—Hosea viii. 7.

The spectacle that meets our eyes at this very time, is one that cannot be contemplated, without exciting many painful reflections. We hear of wars and rumours of wars on every side of the Christian world; and the conflicts of opinion are no less striking than the conflicts of party. The fountains of the great deep, seem as if it were again broken up in men's minds. Old controversies have been revived with the same vigour and ardour as when they were first started, centuries ago. Principles once deemed unassailable, and for ever established, have been questioned and controverted afresh in every hostile form. Modes of worship, but lately regarded as the fading relics of an

ignorant and superstitious age, are now brought forth with new splendour, to court the public admiration; and the power to exercise authority over the faith and the consciences of men, is asserted from a new quarter, with as high and arrogant pretensions as of old, to the unlimited submission of the Christian world.

These stormy agitations moreover, on the outward surface, but serve to show more clearly the deeper struggles of thought and conflicts of opinion that exist below. There are many, on the other hand, whose faith in human creeds having been greatly shaken, are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Dissatisfied with many of the prevailing ideas and views of Christianity, as repulsive and self-contradictory, they have as yet not been able to find out that truth, which can alone bring rest to their minds, and peace to their hearts. Old things are fast passing away; principles and opinions, in which they have hitherto trusted for guidance and support, are daily losing their power over them, while the new things of Christ that would bring them continual light and joy, have not as yet appeared, or have not been arranged into sufficient order and harmony to dispense their blessed influences of truth and love over their souls.

In this state of things, while there are doubtless many whose hearts are failing them for fear, since to their apprehension "the powers of Heaven" are shaken; there are others, not a few, yearning after the true and the good, who are prepared to hail every ray

of light, come from whatever quarter it may, and to welcome every beam of truth that will lead them on to rest and peace, to faith and freedom.*

Such, I conceive, is the state of the Church of Christ, in many of its relations, at the present time, both in this country and on the continent of Europe. It is a state of conflict and agitation; one which the philosopher and the philanthropist, as well as the Christian, cannot contemplate but with the deepest interest. If in some views there may be much to excite pain and perplexity, there is in others yet more to inspire hope. If our faith in Christ, and in the power of his word, be firm and well established, we cannot doubt but that the final issue of this conflict, however long and severe the struggle, shall be most triumphant and glorious for the cause of divine truth,

* See an interesting Letter to the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, by Dr. Tait, Head Master of Rugby School, in which the writer, whose means of information seem very correct, as well as extensive, gives a description of the various theological schools at present existing in the Church of England, of which he enumerates four. The fourth, he says, consists of "a large and growing body of younger men, who are for the most part what is commonly called Low Church in matters of discipline, and whose doctrinal theology is in a great measure modified, if not formed, by the study of the great Protestant writers of the Continent."—P. 12.

"My belief is," he adds, "that this School contains by far the greatest amount of the talent of the rising generation." Its most essential characteristic is, "to promote free discussion and patient inquiry on all subjects, as the only sure method of arriving at truth;" and the late Dr. Arnold is mentioned as a fair specimen of this rising school, "not in the dogmatic results of his investigations, but in that freedom of inquiry which he so boldly advocated and practised." —P. 16.

and for the ultimate prevalence of pure Christianity in the world.*

In these circumstances, I consider the words of our text well fitted to strengthen our faith, and to afford abundant matter, both for warning and instruction, for effort and for hope.

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

We have here set before us an important duty, and a precious promise.

First. The duty which all the disciples of Christ owe to him as such, is to "continue in his word." To become his "disciples indeed," we must believe in him as our divine Teacher, the Christ of God, and receive his word as the truth from God. For hence arises the duty in all its significance and importance, to "continue" therein. Much is evidently implied in this expression; it is full of meaning.

We are to feel content and satisfied with the word of Christ, as all-sufficient for our wants; to follow it implicitly as the sole rule of our faith and practice,

* For a short but interesting account of the great movement now taking place in the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, see a pamphlet entitled, "Luther Revived; or, a short account of Johannes Ronge;" published by J. Chapman, 121, Newgate Street, London. Also, the "Petition of the Catholic Inhabitants of the Town of Offenbach, on the Maine;" published by W. Dearden, Nottingham, and W. Allan, 18, Warwick Square, Paternoster Row, London. In this Petition, ten grievances are enumerated, with great simplicity and effect, from which they pray to be released, forming some of the chief peculiarities of the Roman Catholic Church.

and to abide in it, as the rest of our souls. Hence, therefore, we must diligently inquire, *what* the word of Christ is, and *where* it is to be found, in its unadulterated purity and simplicity, that we may thus receive and obey it.

Where then can we go, with the confidence and certainty of so finding it, but to those authentic and sacred records we possess in the New Testament? Here alone can we read the word of Christ, as it proceeded from his own lips; here alone can we drink of the water of life, pure and undefiled at the fountain-head. Whenever, therefore, we turn aside from this sacred source, or stop short in our approaches unto it, we know not at what impure or troubled streams we may be attempting to slake our thirst. Whenever we add to, or take from, the pure word of Christ, we thereby lose our best guide to truth and happiness. So that to continue therein, simply and unreservedly, from faith and obedience, from trust and love, towards him, as our divine Master, offers a discipline for the understanding, and an exercise for the affections, of the most important kind. Happy had it been for the cause of his truth, had the disciples of Christ been content, at all times, thus to follow and obey the pure dictates of his word only!

They would not then have resorted to those false theories, and those vain traditions, which have made the word of Christ, in so many ways, of none effect. Nor would they have set up any other tests and standards of faith and obedience, than those which

Christ himself has enjoined, and which at once commend themselves to our understandings and hearts, by their charming simplicity and beauty.

The history of the Church of Christ in all ages is, alas! filled with melancholy proofs of the many fatal evils that have arisen from thus departing from his word. Had we no other argument to prove the utter inefficacy of all human creeds and confessions of faith, to secure peace and union, we should find the present divided and distracted state of the Christian world amply sufficient for that end; and not the least so, the distracted condition of the Established Church in our own country at this very time; especially when we remember that it has hitherto always been maintained as her chief boast and distinction, that her unity, strength, and peace, have been secured and preserved by means of her Catechisms and Creeds, her Articles and Liturgy.

Nothing can be conceived more impressive than such a contrast, nor more instructive than this very state of things, to prove to us how utterly vain and futile are all such attempts "for the avoiding of diversities of opinions, and for the establishing of consent, touching true religion."* It may also serve to encourage and strengthen us in our adherence to our great principle of acknowledging the authority of no human creeds, and of calling no man master on earth; but to follow Christ as our only master, and to take his word in the Scriptures as our only rule and guide. This is the only safe, sure, and consistent principle,

* Preface to the Thirty-nine Articles.

that is found in harmony with itself at all times; and by which we shall best perform our duty, as the disciples of Christ, to continue in his word, and in his word alone.

Thus we see, by a striking retribution in the moral government of God, exemplified in so many ways, every day, that "wisdom is justified of her children," by the very evils and dangers into which our own errors bring us whenever we desert her path; and by the force and beauty of those proofs by which truth ever vindicates her own divine nature, and so gradually works out her hardest and darkest problems for the ultimate guidance and happiness of mankind. For there can be no true freedom for the mind, no permanent security for the peace and prosperity of the Church of Christ, no firm and lasting bond to knit the hearts of his disciples together, in union sweet and strong, till, forsaking all other teachers, they resolve to follow alone the one great Teacher sent from God; and consent, with child-like simplicity and docility, to sit at his feet, to learn the truth from his own lips, and to receive it into candid, teachable, and loving hearts.

We have his own express promise in the passage before us that these blessed effects shall follow; and that these heavenly influences shall be diffused over our souls, when we thus aim, as his "disciples indeed," to continue in his word.

Secondly. Let us now consider briefly the important promise which our Lord has annexed to this duty.

"Ye shall know the truth:" the truth of my doc-

trine ; that it comes from God, and is vested with a divine power, to enlighten, to purify, and to bless the soul of man, now and for ever. By the word of Christ we are best instructed in the knowledge of God, of his character, perfections, and purposes respecting us ; and of our relations unto him both for time and eternity. These are truths which it is for the highest interest and happiness of all men clearly to know, heartily to believe, and cheerfully to obey. These are set before us, in the word of Christ, with a divine power, simplicity and beauty, nowhere else to be found ; and are therefore adapted to gain the ready assent, and to win the cheerful confidence, of the common heart of man.

Divested of all vain theories, and even of all mysterious meaning but that which belongs of necessity to the infinite and the eternal, we are taught by Christ to believe in God as our Father in Heaven ; who, for us men and for our salvation, hath sent his son Jesus Christ to live and to die for us ; that, by the power of his divine truth, the efficacy of his spotless example, and the all-subduing influence of his love upon the heart, in the sacrifice of himself upon the cross, he might bring us unto God. Who hath also raised up his son Jesus from the dead, as the pattern and pledge of our own resurrection to an immortal life, and hath exalted him to his own right hand with power and great glory, there to reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."—1 Cor. xv. 25—28.

These are truths written as with a sunbeam on every page of revelation. They deserve therefore our most grateful reception, our firmest faith, and our constant study. They give us the noblest ideas of God as our Father, and of Christ as our Saviour; and admit of the most diversified application to our moral condition and to all the wants of the heart. At the same time that they open before us the most enlarged views of our duties and relations one towards another, and breathe into our souls a spirit of the sublimest devotion to God, and the most expansive benevolence to man.

"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The freedom which Christ here promises, is of the highest and noblest kind. His truth makes us free in our minds to employ our best powers and means to search for and find it; and free in our hearts and affections to obey and love it when found, and to rejoice in its holy and blessed influences. However different may be our various capacities and opportunities, both for knowing and obeying, yet if we sincerely desire to know the truth, and cherish a love of it, we shall not fail to receive it in such measures and proportions as are best adapted to our character, condition, and wants.

We must not suppose from the angry elements of strife and discord that rage around us, from divided minds and alienated hearts, that the gospel of peace and love has altogether failed of its desired effects; or that no remedy yet remains for the many evils that

afflict the Church of Christ. His divine word is still with us as our great hope and stay; and shall yet prove effectual, to fulfil every precious promise that he has made for the progress of his truth, and the triumph of spiritual freedom in the world.

That word has yet many blessings in store for the highest welfare of man. Many have not yet received it, because it has not yet been made known to them, or has not yet been revealed in its divine authority and power. Many to whom it is known, receive it, not, we conceive, in its scriptural purity and simplicity, but mixed with many theological errors, and deformed by many traditional corruptions, that sadly impair its free and ennobling influences. And for us all there is yet much divine virtue to come forth, for the correction of our errors, the enlargement of our views, and the purification of our souls.

For who have yet attained unto the perfect mind of Christ? or wholly brought forth the boundless treasures of his gospel? Time only can fully unfold them; and to the latest period of man's probation on earth, do we believe, that the word of Christ will continually discover higher and nobler properties of truth and love, for the benefit of man, for the progress of society, and for the happiness of the world.

With these convictions it becomes our bounden and urgent duty to manifest our faith in the word of Christ, as of itself all-sufficient to guide us aright to truth, freedom, and happiness. We must firmly assert, not only for ourselves but also for others, the sacred right

and duty of every man, as a moral and accountable being, to think, and inquire, and judge respecting truth, to the best of his powers and opportunities; unfettered by human creeds, uncontrolled by human authority. This is essential to the right exercise and improvement of our spiritual nature; essential to the further knowledge and progress of the truth as it is in Jesus; and essential to the enjoyment of that precious liberty, with which Christ hath made us free, and without which, man cannot rise to that exalted state of dignity and happiness of which he is capable.

We are especially called to advocate and enforce these important principles at the present time, with zeal and firmness, yet with moderation and charity. This duty is strongly recommended by various considerations, two of which, only, I can now briefly notice.

The first arises from that happy state of outward legal security, both for our principles and our property, by means of which, our churches now enjoy rest and peace. This has been effected by that important measure called the "Dissenters' Chapels Bill," which at the time of our last anniversary, during its progress through the Legislature, required so much of our active co-operation, and occupied so many of our most anxious thoughts, but which at length, on the 19th of July last, received the Royal Assent, and thus happily became the law of the land.

The value of this Act, in its relation to religious liberty and freedom of worship, can scarcely be too highly estimated. And though I cannot enter fully

on the subject, there are yet one or two points which I deem it right to notice on the present occasion.

This Act is for the benefit of all classes of Protestant Dissenters; but from peculiar circumstances, well known to most of us, the interests of Unitarian Dissenters were more especially affected.

In relation to them therefore, more directly, the measure was introduced, discussed, and at length brought to a successful issue. If an important benefit is still further enhanced in its value, by the gracious manner in which it is conferred, then I think we have nothing more to wish or desire in this respect, than what we have already received, from the mode in which this boon was bestowed.

The conduct of Her Majesty's Government was throughout as disinterested, generous, and honourable as any on record, in the history of statesmen. Undeterred by difficulties innumerable, and by discouragements of the most formidable kind, but on which I have now no desire to dwell, they maintained their ground with the greatest firmness and consistency, and spoke and acted on our behalf, with the utmost dignity, courtesy and respect.

The same remarks will equally apply to many of our senators in both Houses of Parliament. Some of the greatest men that adorn our country by their station, talents, and acquirements, rising superior to all selfish interests and minor considerations, cheerfully came forward to give to this measure the influence of their high sanction, and the aid of their noble and impressive eloquence.

Nor must we overlook the great principles of religious liberty, and the rights of conscience, that were distinctly recognised and ably enforced on the same interesting occasion. Those very principles, for the sake of which our forefathers sacrificed and suffered so much, and for which, we ourselves have struggled and contended in the face of no small amount of difficulties and discouragements, were then shown, in the most encouraging manner, to have entered into the highest minds of our country; were maintained to be sacred and inalienable within the walls of its Imperial Parliament, in a way never before so generally acknowledged, and the fullest affect given to them by an Act that secures to us and our descendants full liberty of inquiry, and entire freedom of worship.*

Taking into our serious consideration all these things, the unexpected combination of events, the remarkable concurrence of many circumstances, and the unlooked-for instrumentality by which all has been effected, let us unite first of all in offering together the fervent expression of our gratitude and praise to Almighty God our Heavenly Father, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and who over-ruleth all events according to the gracious counsels of his own supreme will, for

* For a most valuable account of the whole proceedings on this important measure, and for a correct report of the many able and eloquent speeches delivered in both Houses of Parliament, see the "Debates on the Dissenters' Chapels Bill; collected and published by the committee of management, and forming a very suitable close to their most important labours. This is a volume that well deserves the perusal and study of every friend of truth and free inquiry, and one that must form an invaluable document in the future history of Religious Liberty in this country.

this happy state of religious privilege and security, which we now enjoy by his good providence. And next, let us pray that he would give us all grace, as the disciples of his son Jesus Christ, to make a wise, faithful, and diligent improvement of it by more active exertions in the holy cause of his gospel, and for the wider spread of Christian truth and freedom in the world.

Our position in this respect is important and responsible in a high degree. If we deem our views of the gospel to be intimately connected with true and honourable conceptions of the character and dealings of God as our Father; of the office and work of Jesus the Christ whom he hath sent; and of the duties and destinies of man as a moral and accountable creature: if, in order to know the truth as it is in Jesus, we must be free in our minds to inquire and judge, and free in our hearts to follow and obey our own convictions respecting it,—then are we required, by every high and holy motive, to hold forth such views of "the word of life," as those who feel the solemn constraints of duty laid upon them; and to labour with increased diligence and zeal, in that portion of our great Master's vineyard which we are appointed to occupy, that when he shall return, he may receive some good fruit thereof, at our hands.

Let us also constantly aim, by word and deed, to prove that it is possible to unite in fairest harmony, the greatest intellectual freedom with the highest spiritual devotion, the firmest faith with the largest charity; and that with all our best powers and affections alive and active in the pursuit of truth, we can yet

preserve and cherish in our hearts the deepest reverence and the holiest love.

Secondly. The present agitated state of the Christian Church, already noticed, offers another powerful motive for us to be true to our duty, and to "contend earnestly for the faith which, we believe, was once delivered to the saints."—Jude, ver. 3. From the discussion of principles, and the conflict of opinions, the cause of truth will, we believe, through the good providence of God, be in the end a great gainer. Pure Christianity has nothing to fear from the most searching inquiry into its true nature and principles, but, on the contrary, has ever come forth, purer, brighter and stronger, from every such ordeal.

In the opinion of one, whose Life and Correspondence have been lately hailed as a most precious gift by the Christian world, and whose fervent love of truth and goodness has attracted towards him the high admiration, both of friends and opponents, speaking on another subject of similar moment, this conflict "involves in it a great shock to existing notions, the greatest, probably, that has ever been given since the discovery of the falsehood of the doctrine of the Pope's infallibility. Yet it must come, and will end, in spite of the fears and clamours of the weak and bigoted, in the higher, exalting, and more sure establishing of Christian truth.*

There are doubtless many, whose faith in the authority and efficacy of human Creeds and Confessions

* Life of Dr. Arnold, Vol. I. p. 396.

has received such a shock, who yet would gladly lay hold on the only sure anchor of faith and hope in the Scriptures, if set before them, in their true spiritual power and divine simplicity. And many there are also who, dissatisfied with the common ideas and representations of Christianity, as degrading and repulsive, are watching and longing for light, as those "who watch for the morning" to whom more generous and exalted views of the Gospel would prove as a healing balm to their wounded faith, and a life-giving power to their wearied souls.

Standing before the world as we now do, more prominently, and, may I not add, more honourably than ever, as non-subscribers to any human tests or creeds; taking the Scriptures as our sole guide, and the New Testament as our only creed, we are especially called upon to hold forth the word of Christ, in its scriptural simplicity, purity and beauty, before the eyes and hearts of men, to the utmost of our power.

For this end, striving to free ourselves, as much as possible, from all the narrow, technical views of a mere party-theology, let us aim continually to open wide our minds and hearts to all the free, generous, ennobling influences of our holy faith in God, and in Christ. Imbibing daily more of the spirit of our divine Master into our hearts, and drinking deeper at that heavenly fountain of truth and love, let us show the full rich efficacy of our faith in him, for all the wants of our condition. Let us prove by our lives, that instead of being a cold, hard, barren system of mere speculation, it is full of divine life, and warmth and

power; satisfying alike our highest thoughts, and drawing forth our strongest affections: that it equally meets our nature, both in its weakness, and in its strength; in its deepest convictions of sin, and in its noblest aspirations after truth and holiness; and that, in short, it is fully able to guide us in life, to support us in death, and to purify and prepare us for eternity.

These are views of Christianity, which it behoves us to explain and enforce with all fidelity and long-suffering. It is one of the chief objects of this Association, to recommend them, in every way best adapted to display them, in their power and importance, before the public attention. It is a great work in which we should all engage, with earnest endeavours to aid its progress to the utmost of our power, and with fervent prayers to Almighty God, for his spirit and blessing, to give success to our labours, so far as they may advance the holy cause of the gospel, and promote his glory in the world.

With such aims, let us be encouraged, under all present difficulties and trials, to labour in patience and hope; firmly believing that the pure word of Christ can maintain its life under the deadliest corruptions, display its power under the severest attacks, and shall eventually rise triumphant over the errors and prejudices of the human heart, and over the ignorance and vices of a sinful world. Nor let us doubt, but that through the agency of his divine word, the Church of Christ shall be gradually purified from its worst errors and corruptions, and that he will thus breathe into the hearts of his true disciples, that heavenly

spirit of freedom, peace, and love, which shall make them all one with him, and with each other, as he also is one with God. Thus let us all strive to be true to our duty to him, and to his word, and so maintain firm and strong unto the end, our faith in God, in Christ, and in truth.

PRAYER.

O God ! of all wisdom, truth and love, grant us, we beseech Thee, thy heavenly grace, that we may approach unto Thee as our Father in Heaven, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. May we receive his word as our only sure guide to truth and happiness ; may we continue therein at all times, that we may know the truth as it is in Jesus, in its divine power, purity and blessedness. May the truth thus received, shed upon us its holiest influences. May it make us free from error and sin, from bigotry and uncharitableness, and from every evil way. And may it also make us free to know, obey, and love Thee, the only true God, through Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, with all our best powers and affections.

We desire to thank Thee, O thou author of every good and perfect gift, for all our blessings and privileges, civil and religious, for the protection of wise and equal laws, and for the rest and security by which we are enabled to offer worship, and obey conscience, without fear of evil. May we show forth thy praise for these and all thy mercies, not only with our lips but in our lives, by increased diligence and zeal in every good word and work, by more abundant labours in the

cause of Christ our divine Master, and by continual endeavours to promote his truth in the Church, and in the world, and so to live in peace and love with all our fellow Christians, and with all our fellow-men.

O God! we look unto Thee for thy blessing: establish and prosper Thou the work of our hands upon us, and lift upon us the light of thy countenance continually: that in all our works, begun, continued and ended in Thee, we may glorify thy holy name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE END.

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THE FISHERS OF MEN:

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN ESSEX STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

AT

THE ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 1846.

By J. G. ROBBERDS.

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A SERMON.

MATTHEW IV. 19.

AND HE SAITH UNTO THEM, FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN.

THERE is something to my mind very striking in the simplicity of this language. The destiny which Jesus was announcing to these fishermen of Galilee, was, in fact, the most sublime to which human beings have ever been called. More was to depend on their future labours than on the exertions of all the world's wisest instructors and greatest benefactors in past or in coming generations. As witnesses unto Jesus, they would have a mission to fulfil and a message to proclaim, in which, so long as the earth should endure, there would be matters of deep import to the whole family of man. Nay, they were to be closely connected with the first movements of an intellectual and moral progress, which was not to cease even when the earth should be no more. Yet with all this real greatness of their future office present to his mind, our Lord uses no pomp of words to set it forth; he seeks after no

magnificence of figurative dress in which to array his meaning; he simply declares to his hearers that they shall be fishers of men.

And this, I think, will be found a general characteristic of his language. However great the thought and sublime the truth contained in it, the utmost simplicity prevails in the expression. His words are exactly those which the time, the scene, the hearers, were most likely to suggest. They are always natural and appropriate, without making us feel that there has been any study to select and arrange them: and this, by the way, is a great presumption that the Evangelists, in what they have recorded as his sayings, have given us his very words, and not their own or other men's inventions.

There appears to me, farther, something very interesting in the circumstances of our Lord and his hearers at the time to which the text refers. To a person standing at that time near the lake of Gennesaret, all that would have met his eye would have been one or two fishing-boats with their crews engaged in the labours of their calling, or interrupting them while listening to one of their company apparently addressing them*. He would have beheld no sign, in either speaker or hearers, of worldly greatness—nothing to make him suppose that there was any one present above the rank of the rest;

* See Luke v. 1–11.

and had his thoughts turned at the time to holy Jerusalem or to imperial Rome, it would never have occurred to him that there could be any connection between the destinies of those two great and magnificent cities, and the history of the humble individuals in view before him. Yet there, in the condition and garb of a Galilæan peasant, was one who was to introduce a worship holier than that of Jerusalem, and to found a dominion wider and more enduring than that of Rome: there was one whom the Jewish priesthood and the Roman power would unite to destroy, but whom, nevertheless, God would raise up from death itself to be Lord of lords and King of kings; and he was even now in the calm confidence that the truth entrusted to him would be thus triumphant, selecting from the simple fishermen around him its future heralds and advocates, and encouraging them with the assurance that thenceforth they should be fishers of men.

What a contrast is here presented between the little that would have been apparent to a human spectator, and the great reality which lay open to the eye of God—between the fishing-boat on the lake of Gennesaret and the far-extended empire of Christianity!

The quiet confidence itself with which our Lord uttered the words recorded in our text, seems to me also worthy of observation. It is as though he actually beheld the success which he was promising. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of

men." He himself had evidently no doubt of the result. The work which his heavenly Father had given him to do—that too which he himself was about to entrust into the hands of others—he knew would prosper. Whatever might become of the individual labourers, their labours would not be in vain. Nay, all that might happen to them would but turn out to the furtherance of the cause in which they were to be engaged. There might be opposition, there might be violence, there might be bonds and imprisonment, there might be death, to be encountered by the servants of God; but all these things would prove only new elements and means of strength to their work. The Son of God, even when lifted up from the earth, would not cease to draw all men unto him. His apostles, through all their "afflictions, necessities and distresses," would yet be successful in the great object of their ministry: they would not the less be fishers of men.

If we consider what could be the reason of this confidence on the part of our Lord, and what the means on which he relied for the fulfilment of his prediction, doubtless we shall think, in the first place, of the knowledge divinely communicated to him, and the divine power which was to accompany and attest both his own commission and that of his apostles. But may we not also think that he trusted not a little to the truth and importance of the doctrines which he was authorized to make known, and to the simplicity, sincerity and self-devotion of

those whom he was about to send forth for the purpose of proclaiming them to the world? He had already received proof that attentive and eager hearers could be found for the Gospel which he had to preach. Only a little while before, as we learn from Luke's narrative, the people had "pressed upon him to hear the word of God." "He taught not as the Scribes and the Pharisees." The subjects of his discourse were not matters of ceremony and ritual observance and traditional usage. He spake of glad tidings for the poor, and healing for the broken-hearted, and deliverance for the captives, recovering of sight for the blind, and liberty for the bruised and oppressed, and a time of acceptance with God. Men felt in listening to him, that he understood their wants, that he knew what was in their hearts, that he was not ignorant of the cravings in their souls for comfort and rest. "His word was with power," not only from his evident conviction that he spake as the Father of spirits had given him commandment, but also from the felt adaptation of his doctrines to the necessities and infirmities of human nature. Why should not their word also be with power whom he was going to send out as preachers of the same doctrines? Why should not they too lay strong hold on the minds and hearts of numbers among their fellow-men, when speaking on subjects of the same vital importance and interest to human beings? It appears to me that our Lord expected his Gospel to be thus in

itself awakening and attractive; and that this was one reason why he so confidently promised to those who were to be its preachers, that they should become fishers of men.

It appears to me, farther, that he must have found another reason for this confidence in his knowledge of the men whom he was intending to invest with the office of his apostles. It is true they were simple, unlettered individuals, partaking too, very probably, in not a few prejudices and false opinions of their time and nation; but they were also single-minded and honest-hearted, ready to follow the directions of one whom they trusted, and even to give up every earthly interest at his bidding. Whatever might be the varieties of their respective characters, whatever weaknesses and imperfections mingled in those characters, yet one little circumstance that is mentioned tells much for them all—"They forsook all and followed him." What a proof was this of their faith in the authority of Jesus to command their services, however they might as yet misapprehend the nature of the work which he had for them! And what an earnest was it also of their devotedness to any undertaking in which he might engage them! Truly may it be said of such men that they had in them the elements of a fitness for the noblest and most heroic enterprises. Let them but know the object to which their exertions were to be directed, and, if it was practicable at all, they were the men to accomplish it. They

had within them the germ of that faith to which all things are possible. They could give up every thing for the sake of that which they believed to be their duty.

Well might he who "knew what was in man," expect from such individuals, that when entrusted with truths in themselves adapted to be powerfully influential on the human mind and heart, and divinely commissioned to go and preach those truths to every creature, they would be neither remiss nor unsuccessful in their exertions: they would, in a most important sense, and to a wide extent, become fishers of men.

In fact, that title—the most honourable, in the case of the apostles, that has ever been attached to human beings,—has not unfrequently been made applicable to others, since their time, who, in two respects at least, have resembled them:—viz. their devotion to some great object, and their readiness to sacrifice every earthly interest for its sake. The apostles, no doubt, were greatly aided by their consciousness of a special and Divine commission to the work in which they engaged. They were aided also by that miraculous power which gave continual and striking evidence, that the Lord who had called them to their office was ever working with them. But, without this supernatural help, and only with that which is always to be obtained from God by sincere and fervent men, much has also been done for the instruction and reformation of the world by

those who, believing themselves in possession of truths essential to human virtue and happiness, have made it their great object to proclaim and recommend those truths, and in their devotion to that object, have been willing to encounter every risk and to give up every selfish consideration.

Yes, seldom have such men been eventually without a large measure of success. The world indeed may not always have accounted them fortunate. Worldly-minded men may often have seen much, as they imagined, to be pitied in their lot, and to be deprecated in their example. Their health and strength may have sometimes given way; their characters may, for a while, have been under a cloud; their earthly career may have ceased before the attainment of their object; but they have succeeded in giving an onward and vigorous impulse to many other minds. They have left numerous and zealous labourers to go on with their work. The great principles for which they lived, instead of dying with them, have become widely and firmly established. The cause for which they laboured, and perhaps suffered, has triumphed. Justice has been done to them by posterity, if not by their contemporaries, and their names, if once held in low esteem, have since risen to honour.

This, I say, has repeatedly been the case with those who have been so far like the apostles, as to have engaged in a service which they believed to be right and important, and, when once entered

upon it, devoted themselves to it heart and soul. They too have become fishers of men. They have gained a firm hold on other minds. They have convinced others of what they believed themselves. They have persuaded others to adopt the same principles by which they regulated their own conduct. They have left a deep impression of their lives and characters on their own and on succeeding generations. The world has felt that such men have lived, and that they have not lived in vain.

It may be said, that errors as well as truths, wrong and hurtful maxims as well as sound and valuable principles, absurd prejudices and superstitious observances as well as just views of moral and religious duties, have been aided in fixing themselves more firmly and diffusing themselves more widely by being taken into connection with earnestness and self-devotion.

Doubtless something of this kind may have taken place. Men who, to a certain extent, have been reformers and benefactors of their fellow-men—men who have made a successful stand against some abuses and corruptions,—may, by the gratitude and veneration which they have awakened, have been unintentionally instrumental in retaining the tide of reform at the point which they had themselves reached. Nay, by the same ardour and self-abandonment which contributed to their success in advancing so far as they did, they may have been led to aim at repressing, and been enabled to repress,

the attempts of others to advance beyond them. This, indeed, has been notoriously the case with some who stand high in the list of religious reformers. A Luther, a Calvin, a Whitfield and a Wesley, together with the beneficial impulses which they have given to the minds of thousands, have also thrown fetters over, probably, as many minds, and put hindrances in their way to wider fields of truth.

But what I wish now to be observed, and what I think will be found to have been the fact, is, that such men have owed their great success in the first instance, not to the errors and imperfections of their respective systems, but to the great truths, the really valuable principles which they have also held, and for which they earnestly contended.

I am indeed inclined to doubt whether there has ever been an instance of extensive and permanent influence obtained by one mind over others without some foundation of truth on which such a mind could rest its appeals. All has not been false, all has not been unsound, in any system of opinions and principles, which has so recommended itself to human beings as to make them think its defence and diffusion worth the devotion of their whole lives. Somewhere in it there must have been what they have felt to be good and wholesome nourishment for their souls. Especially do I think that this must have been the case with all the various forms under which Christianity has commanded the

reverence and zealous attachment of human beings. Each of those forms must have been the clothing of some one great truth, some one really valuable principle at least. And this alone would be a reason why we should not despise any one of them, as though it must needs be an unmingled mass of absurdity and corruption: especially if we find it numbering among its votaries those who have given evidence of a readiness to hazard all their earthly interests for its sake. To them, we may be sure, it must have worn an aspect deserving of their veneration and their love; and in them we ought to respect their earnestness of exertion and self-sacrifice for that which they believed to be true and important.

This is one practical use to make of the reflections in which we have been engaged. But this is not the only lesson to be derived from them. We have been led to consider the success which our Lord promised to his apostles in their honourable office, as expected by him, in part at least, from the great truths of which they were to be preachers, and from their simplicity, honesty and devotedness in preaching them. We have been led also to consider the actual success of later instructors and reformers, as mainly owing to the really just and valuable principles which they advocated, and to the evidences of their own sincerity and zeal in their behalf. What should this teach us in reference to doctrines and principles which we our-

selves believe to be true and important? Did all obligation to carry on a work like that of the apostles—did all possibility of successfully taking part in such a work—cease with apostolic times? Is there now no call upon disciples of Christ to become fishers of men? Or is there now nothing, in the state of the world around us, to make us think attempts to instruct, enlighten, and reform, necessary? Or can we find nothing, in our own views of Christian truth and duty, that deserves any trouble, any sacrifice, any risk, in endeavouring to diffuse them?

Some may think, perhaps, that these are questions more particularly for the consideration of Christian ministers. Certainly, they are questions for the serious consideration of persons holding such an office; but they are also questions for all other members of Christian churches. All have a duty to their Lord—to the truth as they believe it to be in him—to their fellow-men who may be beneficially influenced by a knowledge of that truth. All have some means and opportunities of aiding in making it known; or, at least, they may have such means and opportunities if they will. Too much, in this work, is left to those who are professedly teachers of religion. We are apt to forget that, in our respective spheres, we ought to be all teachers. We are apt to forget that we have, individually, duties of useful influence and impression which we cannot altogether devolve on any substi-

tute. We have our homes, we have our circles of acquaintances and friends, we have our neighbourhoods, in which we may ourselves do something for the promotion of Christian knowledge and Christian principles.

Are we really already doing all that we can for this purpose? Are we making every use which we might of the various institutions intended as channels for the diffusion of such knowledge and such principles? Are we giving them all the support which we might? What time, what thought, what trouble do we bestow on endeavours to extend the dominion of Christ over the minds and hearts of our fellow-men? What are we actually doing, what are we really giving up, for his sake?

My fellow-Christians, let us take such questions home with us. Let us give them our repeated and deliberate consideration. I do not speak as exhorting you, more than I wish the exhortation to be heard within my own heart. If any of you are conscious of needing it, I am not less so. Let us all consider, as in the presence of our Lord, what we might do, more than we are doing, for his service and for his glory.

Had we been with him when he was uttering the words of our text, would he have been likely so to address us? Would he have seen in us the simplicity, the sincerity, the singleness of mind and honesty of heart, from which he expected so much success in his service? Would he have found in us

a disposition to forsake all and to follow him? We shall be best able to answer these questions, when we have considered what we have already done, what we have actually forsaken and given up, from reverence and trust and love in regard to him. If our consciences, after such consideration, accuse us of unfaithfulness to the opportunities of serving him which we have actually had, how can we be sure that we should have been more faithful to those of any other time or situation?

Again I say then, let us deliberately and honestly consider such questions as have been suggested. And so I would say, if I had the opportunity, to all the members of all the churches throughout our land. They are questions which well deserve to be laid to heart by Christians in general. It cannot be pretended by any of them that their form of Christianity has done all the work which the good of society requires to be done. It cannot be denied that, notwithstanding all the efforts hitherto made by its professors under all its forms, there are thousands of minds and hearts which are giving no signs of having yet been brought under its practical power. Now these seem to me just the minds and hearts to which Christians of every creed and every church should direct—and in proportion as they have in them the spirit of Christ, will direct—more and more of their attention. This multitude of those who have not yet been won over to the practical recognition of religion at all, who have not yet

had awakened in them the spirit of devout faith and hope and love; or who have been, by any cause, alienated from the belief and worship of their early years, and unable as yet to find anything better,—this seems to me the class of persons to which all who would really be fishers of men—all who would make converts to God and Christ—should present those aspects of religion and morality which they have felt most attractive to their own minds and most influential for good on their own hearts.

Fallible as we all are, we can none of us be sure that we are in possession of the whole truth. No one denomination of Christians, however numerous, can be sure of this. Not even the whole Christian world, collectively, can be sure of having among them the whole mind of Christ, the whole counsel of God. There may still remain for Christianity a height and depth, a breadth and fulness of development, which it has never yet reached. There may still break forth from the sun of truth and righteousness brighter and warmer beams than have yet found their way to the souls of men. We cannot be sure that it will not be so. But, in the meanwhile, we can tell what doctrines, what principles, what hopes, have been a guiding and cheering light to ourselves. We can tell what representations of God have most made Him seem to us worthy of our reverence and love—what faith in Him has made us most prompt to pour forth our praises and supplications—what faith has most made us feel His

worship a delight and His service perfect freedom. We can tell what words of Christ have fallen with most power on our own hearts, and what views of his character, office, and mission, have most enabled us to perceive in him our way, our truth, and our life. We can tell also under what aspect human nature has appeared to us most deserving of our considerate tenderness, most likely to reward its careful cultivator, and most urgent in its demands for continual and watchful attention to its capacities of both good and evil. We can tell what hope and faith with respect to human destiny, what expectations of aid from God in the great work of human improvement, what prospects of Christ's eventual victories and triumphs, what visions of future glory and happiness for our race, have most cheered our hearts and strengthened our hands, as labourers in the service of our fellow-men.

Now this speaking out freely and freshly from their own actual experience of Religion's power to sanctify, to comfort and gladden—this vivid setting forth of all that they have found most attractive and powerful in their own views of Christian truth —seems to me something which the different classes of Christians have not yet sufficiently done. They have not sufficiently exhibited themselves to the world around them as urged on by their own intense feeling of the good which they have themselves derived from their faith, to try and make others partakers in their joy. They may have seemed

rather, not unfrequently, as chiefly intent on disparaging and invalidating some rival faith. They may have appeared as heated by the spirit of animosity against some other denomination of religionists, rather than as warmed by a holy and loving spirit to attempt the rescue of those whom they have seen living in ignorance, irreligion and vice. They may have been thought, while professing to be soldiers of Christ, to have been more occupied by contentions within the camp, than active in extending his dominion beyond it. And in their attempts as fishers of men, they may not seldom have laid themselves open to a suspicion of being more on the watch to steal from each other's boats, than ready to take every opportunity of casting their nets into the wide surrounding sea.

Some indeed have thought that there is no remedy for these evils of the differences existing among Christians, but a willingness to keep silence on the subjects of them, or, at least, to veil and soften as much as possible their respective peculiarities. In their dislike and dread of sectarianism, and their anxiety to guard against every approach to it, they would have all names of distinction merged in one common and simple profession of faith in Christ. They would have all who can call themselves his disciples, content with that appellation, and agreed to make their desire of extending his spiritual influences over themselves and their fellow-men, the sole and wide ground of theirunion. Th us, they

think, would be presented to the surrounding world the grand and attractive aspect of one, united, comprehensive, and truly Catholic church, having love to God and man as its great principle of action, and acting continually and benignly on the hearts and minds of human beings by the power of that principle. Such a church, they think, would be peculiarly qualified to extend the dominion of Christ, to promote the glory of God, to diffuse within and around it the elements of peace and goodwill, and gradually to gather into its fold all who could be awakened to seriousness, warmed to benevolence, and raised to devotion.

Most heartily do I wish God speed to those who would make more deeply felt by Christians in general their obligation to mutual love. Most thoroughly do I go along with them in their detestation of a sectarian spirit, if by that be meant a spirit of suspicion, jealousy, ill-will, and uncharitableness. Most gladly should I see more union of different religious denominations on the basis of principles in which they are agreed, and for the promotion of purposes which they all have at heart. But much as I desire such union, I would not have it brought about by the compromise of a single doctrine, which to any individual, or to any number of individuals, is a vital truth. I would not risk for its accomplishment any diminution of sincerity, of earnestness, of fervour in devotion, or of firmness in faith. No, I would say, let us rather keep up our nominal distinctions,

and our seeming walls of separation, if we can thereby preserve our security from indifference and lifelessness, and our freedom to pour forth from the fulness of our hearts all that our own experience prompts on behalf of our respective convictions. Still more interesting to my mind, and I cannot but think more eventually successful in extending the practical triumph of Christianity than any plan of a united and comprehensive church, would be the agreement of all the different churches, while retaining their diversities of faith and worship, to lay aside the language of mutual crimination, and simply to do their best for the exhibition of their respective doctrines in that which is to themselves their most attractive and influential aspect. "We believe and therefore speak"—was the principle on which they acted who were most successful as fishers of men. I cannot but hope much from the general and earnest adoption of the same principle by our different Christian communities; providedthat it prompts them rather to speak of the manner in which their own faith acts on their own minds, than of the manner in which they imagine a faith of greater or less extent must act on the minds of others. Let the world have an opportunity of knowing what is the precise good which is actually derived by each separate company of religionists from their peculiar views of religious truth. Let all speak freely and earnestly of what they feel to have been the benefit experienced by their own

souls—of the power by which they have been drawn to the love and service of God—of the beauty and glory which they have discovered in Christ, and of the life which they have found in his words. And let them do this without unkind, disparaging, or disrespectful reference to any who may believe more or who may believe less than themselves. In this way I cannot but think that they would be more successful in gaining the attention of their fellow-men to religion in general; while such is the variety of human minds, that the very diversity of aspect under which Christianity would thus be presented—but everywhere presented in the spirit of earnest faith and hearty love—might be subservient to its increased attractiveness and power.

Consistently with this view of what is required from the different classes of Christians, of course I cannot but consider it the duty of Unitarian Christians to do their best for securing a full and clear exhibition of the doctrines and principles which are peculiar to them, or which they feel to be peculiarly attractive and beneficial to their own minds. According to the spirit of faith which is given unto them, let them also speak;—with mindfulness indeed of their share in human fallibility; with due respect and tenderness for the conscientious and earnest convictions of others; but without reserve, without timidity, without anything like shame of that which to them is truth, Christian and vital truth: let them freely and lovingly open their

hearts to their fellow-men: let it be no secret whispered to the ear in closets, or faintly breathed forth within the walls of their churches, but a confession openly made, that what many call heresy they believe to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and feel to be the power of God unto salvation.

Yes, brethren and fellow-partakers in this still little understood and often misrepresented faith, let us endeavour to do it full justice. By setting it forth in all the beauty which it wears to our own minds, and all the power with which it acts on our own hearts, let us give it an opportunity of being in like manner viewed and felt by others. If there is in it something that we value, that we love, let us speak of it accordingly. If it is to us a light from Heaven, let us not hesitate to invite our fellow-men to come and walk with us in the light of the Lord.

It may be that among those whom no religious influences appear to have yet reached, there are some to whom religion has not been hitherto presented in the form best adapted to attract their attention and win their reverence. It may be that among those who are already in part religious, there are some who are not a little perplexed and burthened by difficulties which appear to them connected with what they have been taught to consider religion. Let us try whether religion, as we have learned it and as we feel it, will not meet with more acceptation from such persons, and occasion them less perplexity. Let us try whether God, in that glory

of paternal love and mercy with which we behold Him surrounded, will not awaken the sensibilities and meet the wants of some to whom He is now either unknown, or known only as an object of dread. Let us try whether Christ, in the beauty of his filial relation and obedience to God, and in the tenderness of his brotherly sympathy with man, will not draw to him some hearts from which he is now veiled in mystery. Let us try whether human nature, in the heights and depths of its capacities for both good and evil, with Christ as a specimen of the greatness and excellence to which it may be raised, and with God ever ready to smile upon its aspirings and aid its efforts, will not seem more deserving of attention and culture to some who are now ignorant or heedless of the trust which in it is committed to them. Let us try whether the prospect of an endless progression to all that is fair and lovely and excellent in human character, and of good finally and completely triumphant over evil in the order of God's Providence—whether the prospect of sin subdued, death destroyed, Christ universally victorious, and Divine love pervading, renewing, and filling with holiness and joy all human souls—let us try whether prospects of this kind have not in them a brightness to awaken the religious spirit in hearts where it is now dormant, and to refresh and invigorate it where it is now struggling with doubt and difficulty.

In attempts of this kind we may all, as it seems

to me, take some part. We may all do something towards the exhibition of the doctrines which are really a light and a life to our souls, in the aspect which they wear to ourselves. We may all find some opportunities of letting others know the character and spirit of the faith that is in us; or, at least, of letting them know how it has commended itself to our own minds and acts upon our own hearts. Writers through the press—preachers from their pulpits—members of congregations in their respective circles, by conversation and the distribution of books,—may all help in setting distinctly and vividly before others the views and principles which are dear and sacred to themselves. Families, or even individuals, residing in neighbourhoods where there is not a congregation with which they feel themselves in sufficient sympathy of faith to join habitually in its worship, may form the beginning of a church, such as was not unknown in apostolic times, by meeting for worship in one of their homes. In a calm and friendly spirit they may make known their reasons for so doing. They may find opportunities of stating to those among whom they live, that their absence from other houses of prayer is not occasioned by indifference to religion, but, on the contrary, by their value for it; not by any irreverence for the great object of worship, but, on the contrary, by their earnestness of desire to worship Him in spirit and in truth; not by any unwillingness to take on them the yoke of Christ,

but, on the contrary, by their deep sense of the obligation that is on them, as his disciples, to let no man become their master in his stead. By a proceeding of this kind, a little band of firm and fervent believers and worshippers may draw attention, from both the religious andthe irreligious around them, to their particular mode of faith and worship. They may induce some of both these classes to come and learn what it is of which they make so great account; and so far as they are in possession of important and vital truth, they may be instrumental in gaining for that truth an entrance into other hearts and other minds with like power to that which it exercises over their own.

Associations of churches and of individuals may also be of use, and often of great use, in aiding and encouraging one another, while thus attempting to hold forth for wider acceptation that which is to themselves the word of life. They may cheapen the publication, and facilitate the distribution, of books and tracts which explain and recommend their peculiar faith. They may send out preachers to exhort and strengthen the more distant and isolated communities. They may assist other communities in securing to themselves the permanent services of useful and valued ministers. They may enable every brother in the faith, wherever situated, and how few soever he may find in his immediate neighbourhood prepared to sympathise with him, yet to feel himself really connected with a much

larger number who are all of one heart and of one soul.

In this manner, I apprehend, the particular Association on behalf of which we are now met, is intended to make itself useful; and in this manner, I believe, it has often made itself useful. But its services might be far greater, did it receive the support which might not unreasonably be hoped from our brethren in the faith throughout the land. A very moderate contribution from every one who can afford to give, or even from every one of our larger and wealthier churches, would place a fund at its disposal, which, under considerate and judicious management, might render most important aid to several of our smaller and poorer communities. To some of them, indeed, such aid might make all the difference between an anxious and arduous struggle for continuance, and a steady progress to a healthy and flourishing condition.

It is not for me to say why an Association capable of being made so much more extensively useful, has not been more heartily and liberally supported. But, perhaps, one reason may have been what I would fain believe a misapprehension of its real character and objects: viz. an opinion that its proposed work is chiefly of a controversial nature; to pull down rather than to build up; to attack and disparage the faith of others, rather than to set forth our own faith in all the beauty which it wears

to our own minds, and in all the power of its moral and religious influences on our own hearts.

If so, may I not say for our Association and for those who are already its supporters, that such an opinion does not do either it or ourselves full justice? May I not say for all of you, brethren, as well as for myself, that what we above all things desire, is, not so much to prove erroneous and hurtful what other men declare to be true and salutary, as to exhibit that which to us is true and salutary in exactly the aspect which it wears to our own minds, and with the influence which it exerts on our own hearts? May I not farther say, that we are not so much concerned about making those who are already serious, benevolent, and devout, in connection with some different form of Christianity, transfer themselves and the recommendation of their character to our section of the Christian church, as we are desirous of trying whether the faith which we feel mighty for sanctification and comfort, will not make serious, benevolent, and devout, those on whom no other faith appears yet to have laid powerful hold?

Whether I may or may not say this for you, my fellow-Christians, I must repeat my conviction, that we shall be most likely to become fishers of men—most likely to win their favourable attention to the claims which God and Christ, the capacities and wants of their own nature, and their relations

to their fellow-men, have upon them, if, on all these and like subjects, we speak to them from the fulness of our own hearts, the earnestness of our own positive and decided faith, and the experience which we have really had of our faith in its practical influences.

I would now commend this my conviction, and all that I have said in support of it, to your candid and friendly consideration, praying for you and myself that, by the aid and guidance of God's holy spirit, we may be led into all truth, and that whatever truth we possess we may never be ashamed to avow or unwilling to communicate. Amen.

THE END.

PRINTED BY RICHARD AND JOHN E. TAYLOR,
RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST THE SOURCE AND PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OLD GRAVEL-PIT MEETING-HOUSE, HACKNEY, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 26TH, 1847,

BEING

THE TWENTY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN

UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

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A SERMON.

LUKE IV. 18.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

With what astonishment must the members of the Synagogue at Nazareth have heard these words applied by Jesus to himself! The first impression, indeed, seems to have been one of acceptance and admiration on their part, for all great emotions are contagious. But reflection in a few moments brought distrust, distrust led to disbelief, and disbelief prompted the use of violence. True indeed it was, that the greatest men of the Hebrew nation had come from humble stations. Abraham was a wandering Arab; David rose from a sheepfold to a crown; and not improbably Isaiah himself was the son of the prophet Amos, who "among the herdsmen of Tekoah" gathered sycamore fruit for their sustenance (Amos i. 1; vii. 14). It is also probable that the home where Jesus had dwelt in Nazareth was distinguished for the domestic virtues, and for a deep, earnest and operative spirit of religion; for Joseph was a just or considerate man, and Mary was

eminently contemplative, devout, and affectionate. It is more certain that those were gracious words which proceeded out of the young speaker's mouth, and those tones and that manner already indicated the prophetic authority with which he was afterwards to address and captivate the people. The heart bent in gratified submission before his lofty enthusiasm;—but the head asked the question, "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark vi. 3.) and in a few minutes the speaker is in danger of his life. Thus rapid in unenlightened or prejudiced minds is the transition from admiration to contempt and hatred; and thus by its essential features does the narrative, of which my text forms a part, avouch itself to be a brief chapter in the common history of our race. The Nazarenes recurred to Joseph's trade, in pursuits connected with which they had probably seen Jesus himself engaged; and although hand-labour with them was not held in the discredit which attaches to it in these days and in this country, yet, unable to rise above its humble associations, they lost the inspiration of the prophet in the mean engagements of the artizan. Lamentable short-sightedness is this; and that, too, on the part of the worshippers in the synagogue at Nazareth—the men of piety, note, and influence of the town. Theirs is the darkness which comprehended not this light. Theirs is the littleness which had only a transient sympathy with this moral greatness and divine love. In proceeding to the synagogue that morning, their eyes must have encountered objects that needed and craved the very aid of which Jesus spake. Yet they contemptuously bade him heal himself, and hurrying him to the

brow of the hill whereon their city was built, attempted to cast him down headlong.

If, however, passion and prejudice had not wholly superseded their judgment, they could not have failed to discover that it was not by fanaticism or hardihood that Jesus was actuated in the step which he had just taken. Had not his youth and early manhood been passed before their eyes? Could any one convict him of sin? If his life had been laborious, it had also been both pure and useful. And could even ordinary minds fail to discern tokens of superiority in the gentleness of his tones, the elevation of his manner, the mild deep lustre and conscious greatness of his eye? Why is he wont to retire from the intimacies of home and the haunts of men? Why does the setting sun often leave him on the summit of the loftiest of those hills? Why, when there, may he be seen, now on his knees in fervent prayer, now with his eyes straining over the blue waves of the West, and now gazing towards the "climes of the Sun," as though he revolved a project that embraced all parts of the world, and had God for its author and support? Nor is it an ordinary thing that he has now done in thus addressing the congregation ere it broke up. Nor is it in an ordinary manner that he has performed his task. No! this is no ignorant enthusiast. He is well acquainted with the scriptures which are your sole literature. He has chosen his subject from the loftiest passage in your sublimest poet. He has made the highest claim that Jew can make: he has touched the deepest chord in the national heart: he declares himself to be the long-expected and ardently-desired Messiah. The terms in which the claim

is advanced are familiar to you: the language in which he has read them is that of your learned men: the historical allusions therein contained, recall the brightest points of your history. You have no dispute with him as to the evidence; your Rabbis admit that Isaiah in these words spake of Christ; and thus he who stands in your presence is proved to be well instructed in your highest lore. Still more, he is familiar with the sympathies of your nation: he shares your loftiest desires: he has aims that are as grand as they are worthy. You reply, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John vii. 15.) Granted, he is not one of your professed teachers; he never sat at the feet of Gamaliel, but his possession of civil and religious knowledge you cannot deny, nor that he is disposed to apply his knowledge to the most worthy of all purposes.*

In thus standing at the head of the highest knowledge of his country, Jesus was fitted to accomplish the task announced as his own in the synagogue at Nazareth. He that aims to benefit the future must be well acquainted with the past and the present. There is in the workings of Providence, no less than in the flow of time and the general progress of events, a continuity which the social reformer cannot safely disregard. We must learn what already is and has been, before we can determine what ought to be. And sound and lasting impulse for the removal of social ills can arise only in the mind that has long dwelt in contemplation on existing realities. Besides, every evil has an historical relation, for it has its roots in the past. For its extirpation you must go back

* See Note, p. 24.

to earlier states of society. And in your aims for the future you must know, not only what is desirable, but what is possible: the more elevated your ideal, the greater is your need of a practical acquaintance with the capabilities and wants of the present age. Little knowledge, indeed, and less culture, are required to destroy. The axe of republican ignorance was sufficient to break in pieces the precious monuments of mediæval art; and the superficial scorn of Gallic philosophy could blight the religious emotions of a whole generation: but if you wish to construct no less than demolish; if, after the manner of Christ, you aim to fulfil, and so to improve and reform, you will find no amount of knowledge too great, no culture of mind and heart too large or too elevated. What indeed is it but knowledge and its mellowing influences that distinguishes the reformer from the anarchist, keeps the loftiest enthusiasm within the bounds of moderation, directs impulse into proper channels, and leads it to the achievement of permanent good? Without knowledge, Christ might have overturned the Jewish state, but would not have proved the Saviour of the World.

Strikingly, and in repeated instances, is the value of his knowledge exemplified in the ministry of Jesus, through the whole of which it exerts a more or less obvious and decided influence. In consequence of this knowledge, he finds himself on all occasions, and in the greatest emergencies, equal to meet and overcome his learned, malicious, and embittered assailants, who never cease their efforts to ensnare and destroy him. The Pharisees put to him questions, the answers to which

will, they expect, embroil him with the Sadducees. His replies disappoint both, and bring into relief great spiritual truths, for whose promulgation he was sent into the world. Complex, entangled, and delicate, were the political relations of the Jewish nation. Meshes are hence prepared; but the wise teacher knows how to avoid the snare. "Is it lawful," asked his enemies, "to give tribute to Cæsar?" If he answered "Yes!" he lost the sympathies of the people, and compromised himself and his cause with patriots in high and influential stations. If he gave a reply in the negative, he thereby laid himself open to the charge of treasonous designs against the military rulers of the land. "Shew me a penny—whose image and superscription is this?" "Cæsar's." Then you have yourselves given a practical answer to the question. Obey the earthly power, whose sovereignty you thus recognise; but render unto God the things that are God's. Quitting these minute points, instances of which abound in the Gospels, we find our Lord taking a survey of the entire Jewish polity, now revising, enlarging and completing the Mosaic legislation, and now exposing and condemning the tradition of the elders, with views no less exact than comprehensive, a full perception of the bearings alike of his own religion and that of Moses, and aims so high and far reaching, that society, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, is only beginning to comprehend them, but which, when attained, will make the world peaceful and happy.

It is, then, a great mistake to suppose that Jesus was unfurnished with secular knowledge. Equally unwarrantable is the assumption that secular knowledge may

be safely forgone by those who now labour in his cause. What the great master had, his scholars, it may be presumed, ought to possess. If, in the providence of God, the Messiah was put into possession of the highest culture of his country, ordinary men cannot well bring forth good fruit unless, in this particular also, they resemble him in whose work they profess to be engaged. And if there is truth in the complaint that the Christian pulpit is losing its influence, the cause may be found in the very defective culture of some of its occupants, and the noisy and excited ignorance of many others. We must increase its real power if we would augment its efficiency. The successful ministration of a religion whose very roots lie in an historical condition which runs back over nineteen centuries, implies and demands wide and accurate knowledge, as well as a spirit of true philosophy, and a heart disciplined and mellowed by intercourse with many ages and diverse states of society.

Groundless, also, is the notion that the inspiration of Jesus was disconnected with his earthly relations. From them, indeed, it did not spring, but it was in part conditioned by them. In the language of the Hebrew writings, and after the manner of Hebrew thinking, did he, in the words of my text, announce his great commission. And this national element runs through all his teachings; useful, indeed, as an evidence of their reality, but also separable, and to be separated from them by those who would receive and apply them in their highest and most comprehensive bearings.

But while it is certain that our Lord's mind was impressed, aroused, and made intent on the duties of his

office, by the contemplation of actual ills and pressing wants; that his whole nature was refined and enriched by the kind and judicious cares of his mother's thoughtful heart; by the serene lustre of those skies, and the lovely richness of that vale, and the flowing girdle of those hills, in the midst of which he lived; that his piety was deepened and elevated in communing with the sacred books of his nation, and by his habitually taking part in the public homage paid to the God of his fathers; that his early destination to the high office of being the deliverer of the Hebrew people, and the dim consciousness that hence ensued, of a vocation more lofty, ideal, and comprehensive, than any current forms of speech embodied,—served to make him give willing entertainment to all that was pure in motive, generous in purpose, and devout; so that in looking back on his earlier days, he might have said:—

> "When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be public good; myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things."

Yet, high and ennobling as were these influences, there was one far higher than they, one to which Jesus mainly owed his inspiration, and in that his fitness for the sublime office of being the teacher of all ages, and the Saviour of mankind; I allude to the felt presence of his God and Father in the very centre of his soul. In the simple but pregnant words of scripture, "God was with him;" and the authority that states this as a fact, gives it also as a reason why "Jesus of Nazareth went about

doing good" (Acts x. 38). That the spirit of Jehovah was upon him, the spirit of Him whose "tender mercies are over all his works," I want no better proof than what I find in the tenor of Christ's address to the Nazarenes. I there recognise the benign accents of providential and restorative love, as distinctly as I trace the existence of the Creator in the laws and harmony of the universe. And when I call to mind that those words which were then applied to the great spiritual purposes of the new religion, formed part of that revelation by which it was preceded, I find in the connection of the two the workings of Providence and the hand of a common Father, who leads his children on from one degree of light to another, in the fulfilment of his benevolent will, that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

By what means the divine mind wrought on that of Jesus so that he had the spirit without measure, we do not know, and I think it vain to inquire. But we cannot mistake, in the teachings and life of Christ, tokens of the wisdom and love of Him who is the fountain of life and happiness to beings without number and worlds without end. Surely those words, so full of import and so rich in blessing for all who suffer, exemplified as they were in the deeds and sufferings of Jesus, suffice to attest and sanction as well as to explain these declarations: "The spirit of Jehovah is upon me;" "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me" (John vii. 16); "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of my Father" (vi. 38). If the spirit of Jesus was not divine, what do we mean by the term? If there is not inspira-

tion in those words, and in that soul, and in the whole public life of Christ, inspiration has ever been unknown on earth! If God was not in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. v. 19), there are no signatures in heaven or on earth which attest His operation, there are no tokens that indicate His presence. The union in thought, word, and action, of the loftiest wisdom with the most tender and comprehensive benignity, is—in the highest sense of the term—divine.

Such was the life of Christ. In its source, its operations, its effects, the life of Christ was divine. The whole tenor of what he said, did, and suffered, after his appropriation to himself of Isaiah's words, was a practical commentary on their import.

Nor did there on the part of man fail to be a recognition of this divine presence, that enlightened and blessed the land. When the blind saw, and the deaf heard; when the disconsolate received back to life their lost friends; when those who hungered and thirsted after spiritual truth were filled with light, and so found strength and comfort,—they were not only "astonished" at his wisdom and mighty works (Mark vi. 2), but also exclaimed, "A great prophet is risen up among us, and God hath visited His people" (Luke vii. 16).

The announcement by Jesus of the objects of his mission now under consideration, shows that he came to teach certain doctrines, and that the doctrines which he did teach were few and simple. What are the means by which such a purpose can be accomplished? The character of the undertaking declares the nature of the ministry. He that gives spiritual freedom must communicate spiri-

tual light. He that would raise the fallen must employ the remedial influences of love. Hence Jesus taught, and in his own loving deeds proved, that God is the Father of Humankind, "hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel xxxiii. 11): "is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James v. 11): and will "glorify" those who are conformed to the image of His son (Rom. viii. 29, 30), in some eternal and blissful mansion of His own boundless home (John xiv. 2), continuing to carry forward the great process of Christian education, until, in making His own will universal, He shall Himself be 'All in All' (1 Cor. xv. 24, seq.). These great spiritual truths, which are among the widest of all generalities, and can no more pass away than the throne of Him from whom they came, are taught at once by the lips and the deeds of Jesus Christ, and in this their promulgation appear as at once the object and the fulfilment of the work his Father had given him to perform. Here mistake is impossible.

It is not less clear to my mind that he who had such an aim could not have taught a system of complex and mysterious abstractions, the merit of whose reception is in the direct ratio of their difficulty, and whose operation on the heart is not to foster, but to overpower, suppress and keep in subjection. The two influences, the simple faith of the life of Christ, and the complex and coercive faith of metaphysical creeds, are so diverse, so incongruous, nay, so conflicting, that both cannot be imputed to the same mind, nor have come down from "the Father of Lights" (James i. 17). Indeed, there is no feature in the ministry of Jesus more marked than the way in which he avoids, puts aside, or discountenances, the ver-

bal and cloudy disputes of the Jewish Schools, in order to substitute and bring into prominence his own simple, lovely, and touching religious teachings. Philosophy and sect, a hard dogmatic theology, and a cloudy mysticism, the ascetic seclusion of the Essene, and the bold and chilling denials of the Sadducee, all stood in the presence of Jesus, and were all shunned or rebuked. The spirit of the world, in forms not unlike those which it now wears, fled before the Spirit of Jehovah; philosophy bowed the knee to religion; scepticism retired abashed before the face of divine and deathless love; and tradition hastened back to its native darkness, when that "great light shone from heaven around" the land (Acts xxii. 6).

Besides, it is by words and deeds that this prophet of the Lord labours for the good of man. In his ministry the tongue supersedes the pen, and the act alone gives the comment. The life of Christ is his religion. Not a word does he commit to writing. The foundations of his kingdom are laid in the warm and loving memories of human hearts. For nearly a quarter of a century his sublime life finds no other earthly shrine than what is afforded in the infant church. The simple purity of inspired love, such a channel could faithfully convey to coming ages; but the moment you begin to reflect on the nature of complex and minutely ramified forms of religious opinions, you feel assured that no such system of doctrinal theology could in any way have been received by the heart, and transmitted by the tongues of the primitive followers of Jesus. No! these agglomerations of thought from distant regions and diverse states of

mind; those misty abstractions, built up like summer clouds into a certain mock regularity; those dark propositions based on others only a little less dark; those metaphors, piled together with nicest care, as if every one were a reality, and the united whole a transcript of the divine mind; those shadows and films of ideas whose changefulness is their only permanent quality, which bear the name of creeds and confessions of faith, whether they date back to the earlier centuries of the Christian era, or take their rise with the age of the Reformation, are all at once condemned by the undeniable facts, that Jesus neither taught any dogmatic system, nor wrote what he did teach.

Broadcast over the land did he scatter "the words of this life" (Acts v. 20), with a high and confiding trust that they would not perish, but bring forth an unbounded harvest. Was he wrong in his confidence? Was he deceived in his expectation? Yes, if he aimed to make his disciples agree in matters of speculative opinion. Not so, however, if his purpose was to found a community in which the love of God and man should ever strike deeper root and produce diviner fruit. Let the life of Christ be the life of the world, and you can understand how, when it came gushing forth from his inmost soul, it would find a welcome in the hearts of friends: who, feeling deeply its loveliness and worth, would perish rather than lose or deteriorate the priceless trust. But unless we are to leave the master and follow our fellow disciples, we cannot consent to receive as his any complex body of opinion, "formed by art and man's device," in ages after not only Jesus had ascended, but the fathers

had fallen asleep, and when the church was on all sides exposed to the incoming corrupt tides of Oriental and Western Heathenism.

Of all the causes of the success of Jesus, his own personal qualities are the chief. Among these qualities one or two only can now be mentioned. Advert to his singleness of purpose. His entire soul was set to learn and execute the divine will. And when he had ascertained that it was the will of God that he should devote himself to the salvation of the world, he concentrated all his energies on that one point. Hence an entire absorption of mind and heart in the great undertaking. This absorption gave clearness to his view, definiteness to his aims, strength to his purpose, and unity to his character. In every juncture the most suitable thoughts sprang up in his mind, which prompted the most natural and expressive terms, so that all his influence wore the character of a spontaneous outpouring of living waters. Gladly, therefore, was he heard by all those whose natural sympathies were fresh and active. Human bosoms responded to the tones of his voice. When he wept, eyes filled with tears. His commands were instantly obeyed. Those who did not fully comprehend his claims, felt the power of his word, and were drawn and kept around him by an irresistible charm. One thing none could misunderstand, deny, or cloak—he was the friend of man. All his teachings and all his acts were designed and fitted to abate human misery, assuage human griefs, and turn the prodigal to God. From the foundation of the world, so pure, disinterested and lofty a display of love to man had not been seen on earth. It was felt by most

hearts; its merits dwelt on many tongues: scarcely was there a district of Judæa which had not been lighted up by the soft radiance of his benign countenance, and gladdened by the melting accents of his glowing love.

Nor least among the intense and harmonised qualities of his life was its religiousness. Jesus was a wise and patriotic reformer, an enlightened and practical moralist. But he was more; he was 'a teacher sent from God,' and 'the Saviour of the World.' Religion was his central affection: it pervaded his whole life, guided all his exertions, coloured all his thoughts, and glowed in every word. God with him was the source of obligation, light, impulse, power and beneficence. As from God he derived all, so did he refer all to God, with whom in affection, purpose and act he was one. Hence a heavenly light illumined his face, and a religious grandeur environed his person, before which hearts bowed in deep reverence, and from which the wicked retired abashed. Wherever he went, men, confessing a sanctity before unwitnessed, readily yielded themselves to his sway, and under his guidance were led upwards to God and to eternal life. And when at last all the treasures of his knowledge, the skill of his understanding, the gentleness and benignity of his heart; when the greatness and sanctity of his entire character received their consummation in his high-minded defence before Pilate, and his patient endurance of an agonizing death; and when the horrors of that dark scene had been succeeded by the light of the resurrection, and the glories of his ascent to 'the right hand of the Majesty on high,'—the human soul was overcome, and filled with wonder, love, and praise.

Then daily were large numbers added to the church; Apostles went forth,

> "By winning words to conquer willing hearts,
> And make persuasion do the work of fear;"

and that grand missionary enterprise began which will find its termination only then, when all shall know Jehovah, from the least unto the greatest.

If we gather together the several elements which we have found in the life of Jesus, we are taught that a genuine ministration of Christian influences comprises high intelligence, active and devoted benignity, and deep, entire, and fervid religious consecration: all centred in one soul, and acting harmoniously for the one great object of promoting the will of God, in the rescue, improvement and elevation of his needy, ignorant, sinful and suffering children. This, as being an epitome of the life of Christ, is the very essence of the gospel, considered as a great remedy for human woes. This it was which made Christianity, at the first, worthy of all acceptation. This it was which made it the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation. The same assemblage of divine qualities has been the source of all the highest good it has achieved, through every succeeding age down to the present. Here is the great secret of its actual power. Our own hearts are witnesses to this truth. It is from the life of Christ we draw our spiritual life. And it is by keeping close to him, that we shall grow, make increase, and do good, whether as individuals, churches, or societies. It is only as branches in the vine that we can be filled with living sap, and "bear much fruit." Whatever else we may attempt or disregard, we must

not wander from "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." As theologians, we may employ our time and care in purifying the original fountains of our religion, and exhibiting the strength and trust-worthiness of its historical foundations; as Unitarians, we may most laudably strive to remove the rubbish which in the course of many centuries has gathered around the temple of Christ; as philosophers, we may investigate every province of Nature, and speculate on the high topics of Creation, Providence and Redemption; yet as Christians, our first duty is to sit in reverent love at the feet of Jesus, that having received of his spirit we may go and teach, suffer, and, if need be, die as he did for the glory of God and the good of man. And then are all other pursuits of the greatest value when they each contribute their share to make us in the first place like Christ in our own souls, and after that his faithful and diligent followers in labours of love on behalf of all who need our aid, whatever be their condition, their clime, their colour.

A work of this nature may with peculiar propriety be prosecuted by the Society for the promotion of whose interests we are assembled this day. The fundamental principles of that Association are few indeed, but most important; while they suggest and demand every judicious exertion for the advancement of a pure and enlightened religion, in which reason and sentiment shall work in harmony, and 'faith, hope, and charity' combined be in active operation. In the service of the great Father of mankind, and "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," as the sole object of divine worship, the primary

source of all obligation, the great hope, confidence and final home of the soul; in the reverential, obedient, and loving imitation of his son, as the representative, messenger and image of God, oneness with whom is the highest human good; and in the simple, earnest and affectionate furtherance of God's will in Christ, so as to open the eyes of the spiritually blind; to undo the heavy burdens laid on conscience by mistaken men; to set at liberty them that are bound in the bonds of false fears and in the degrading servitude of sin:—this in brief is the vocation—the high and holy vocation—which you, my brethren, have received. With such principles for the essence of your individual convictions and your bond of union, you cannot fail more or less effectually to labour in the general vineyard of Christian benevolence. No time-honoured forms of opinion have you to maintain against the growing intelligence of the age. You are freed-men of the Lord, and have only to love and seek truth yourselves, and aid your fellow men in their quest of its treasures. By no personal interests of a narrow kind are you hindered in the labour of love, for if you are unrewarded by social distinctions, you are also unshackled by official trammels; and standing on the common soil of your country simply as men and fellow citizens, are at full liberty to take part in every effort which approves itself to your judgment. A necessity is indeed laid on you—a necessity which ensues from the principles that you have formed with care and professed not without the endurance of penalties—a necessity is laid on you to give utterance to great spiritual truths taught by Christ, approved by every sound mind and much needed in the world. Is the Creator

in your deliberate conviction the Father of His creatures, and is the import of that term to be learned from the life of His son? Then the love and service of God is as much the dictate of the heart as it is the requirement of the head: then an all-trusting reliance on His mercy, alike in the troubles of this state and the solemn awards of the next, is a deduction simple enough for a child to make, and valuable enough for the most gifted to welcome: then every human being is both God's child and your brother; all that are in need have a claim on your love: caste and clan vanish in the noble and comprehensive title of man: national predilections are raised and refined into general goodwill; and Christianity itself appears as the grandest of those instruments by which God is working out the great problem of human happiness. The man with whom these are not speculations, but deep vital truths, cannot be indifferent to the errors he sees around him, to the sufferings he beholds; to the yet greater misery he knows to exist. In every righteous undertaking he has a sympathy, and, so far as possible, takes a part. Neither by time nor place will he allow his charities to be restricted. The immediate necessities of his famishing fellow Christians he ministers to with a pitying heart. The injuries of the enslaved on distant shores he mildly but firmly proclaims, demanding redress in the name of a common nature and a common religion. But first within his own heart, and then in his own home, and after that around his neighbourhood, does he employ his chief care to bind up the broken-hearted, heal social wounds, and make the gospel abound and flourish; if by any means avoiding the condemnation of

being unfruitful, he may glorify God by doing some good to man. And when persons of this spirit combine in pursuit of a common object—true members of the Catholic Church of Christ, with a view to its advancement in the world; then, taking the life of their master as the source and pattern of their public influence, they seem, as a matter of course, to assume a missionary attitude, and undertake an aggression against ignorance, sin, error, formality, oppression, unequal laws, social partialities, and all unreal, hollow, and deceptive things. And whenever a body of Christians having a full portion of the spirit of their master shall appear in the world, working and struggling for the removal of these prevalent ills, and for the substitution of individual excellence and social health, then will they receive ready homage from all sects, classes, and conditions, and will reap a harvest of personal satisfaction and Christian usefulness with which our present measures of good bear no comparison. No! Love has not lost its power over the human heart. Religion is still a deep reality in the centre of man's soul. Jesus, in the undying principles of his Gospel, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8). It is we—we, who minister at the altar—we, who frequent the sanctuary—it is we who are wanting in our duty. Our own hearts need first to be touched with a deeper love of God, and then shall we bear and offer to others the "good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Luke ii. 10). In a state of society so extraordinary as the present, we must not be content with ordinary and established modes of Christian ministration. With a due regard to the fundamental purpose of this Association, we must go forth and preach "the

everlasting gospel" (Rev. xiv. 6) to our ignorant, needy, yearning fellow men. And if, in order to do so, we have to interrupt the periodical routine with which we each now appear weekly in one pulpit and speak to a small circle of hearers; if we are led to more free and earnest modes of appealing to human sympathies; if we allow the minister occasionally to pass into the philanthropist, and forget the theologian in the man; if, from hearts full of love and pity for the unenlightened, yet not unimpressible, nor altogether unprepared minds, now found in large numbers in the humbler ranks, we utter words of truth, soberness, and heavenly love, and so seek to gain the public ear by appeals to generous, noble, and far-reaching charities; if, in addition to more formal instructions, we distribute from house to house—wherever a door is opened—the nourishing bread of Christian truth, after the manner, and in humble imitation, of him "who went about doing good," and performed his divine work, now on the hill side, now on the borders of a lake, now in a cottage, and now in the press of the city, as well as in the synagogue and the temple,—we shall find that by drawing in our ministry more nearly to Jesus, we gain a surer and more ready access to the hearts of our brethren, and accomplish more for them and for God and Christ; and so may each, in his own position, when his eye grows dim, and his natural strength is abated (Deut. xxxiv. 7), and he feels himself on the point of rendering in his account, entertain the well-grounded hope that he has not lived wholly in vain, and will leave the world, rendered by his exertions, somewhat better than he found it.

NOTE.

The passage whence the text is taken, contains several points which are either interesting as facts or important as confirmations of the reality and trustworthiness of the recorded events.

I. What we may term the external circumstances accord with customs known, on Jewish authority, to have been observed in the Services of the synagogue. These we shall briefly state. Jesus, as a resident of Nazareth, was a member of its synagogue. In consequence, he had a right to be present at the public services. One part of those services consisted in reading the law, or the five books of Moses, and the prophets. The reading was ordinarily conducted by persons specially chosen for the purpose. On extraordinary occasions, others, probably on permission being obtained, engaged in reading a portion of Scripture. Whilst engaged in the office, the reader stood. Having finished his reading, he gave back the book to the attendant, or Chassan, from whom he had received it. Then if he wished to address the congregation, he took his seat at the desk, and on being invited (Comp. Acts xiii. 15, seq.) gave utterance to what he had to offer. These practices are observed on the occasion spoken of in the text.

II. If, from the general form, we enter a little into particulars, we find similar correspondences. The Jewish Scriptures did not form one compound whole, like our Bible, but existed each separate from the rest. Accordingly, Jesus is furnished with one book only, namely, the prophecies of Isaiah; indeed, the original might perhaps be rendered *a copy* (not 'the book') of the prophet Isaiah. This manuscript was rolled up on rollers fastened at the two extremities of the manuscript, each to each. In order to read any portion, the reader had to unroll the volume (*volvo*, 'I roll,') till he came to the required place. Accordingly, in the Greek we find terms signifying, not as in our version to 'open,' (17,) and 'close,' (20,) but to 'unroll,' and to 'roll up.' (See A Layman's Translation in the margin.) The words given in Luke were probably not all that Jesus read. By reference to Isaiah lxi., where occur the words cited by the Evangelist, the reader may find reason to think, that, after the manner of Jewish writers, Luke cites only so much as was necessary to refer to the entire passage. Sometimes even fewer words than we find here in our historian were accounted sufficient to

indicate portions of Scripture intended to be referred to in evidence or illustration. (Comp. Mark xv. 34, and Ps. xxii.)

III. Of yet greater importance is the question, In what language did Jesus read the passage? The words actually found in Luke are (see especially the Editions of Griesbach and Tischendorf) in the Greek of the Septuagint version, with which, rather than with the original Hebrew, they correspond. Was this version used in the synagogues of Galilee at this time? If so, Jesus must have been familiar with Greek. Such a familiarity is not unlikely. From the time of Alexander the Great, the Greek tongue gained continually more and more prevalence in Western Asia; and in Galilee, as a great centre of pagan and commercial influences, that language was, in the days of Christ, constantly employed. Hence we find Greek synagogues in Jerusalem. (Acts vi.) In Matthew viii. 5, Jesus without an interpreter converses in Greek, (as the narrative stands) with a pagan military officer; in xxvii. with Pilate; and in Mark vii. 26, also to all appearance without an interpreter, he speaks with a Greek woman, 'a Syrophenician by nation.' If then our Lord read in the synagogue from the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, we find an illustration of the statement made in the discourse, that he was by no means destitute of secular learning. It may however be thought more probable that it was from the original Hebrew of Isaiah that Jesus read. In this case the use of the Septuagint version is to be ascribed, not to our Lord, but his biographer. Equally on this supposition does the knowledge of Jesus make itself apparent. He had, it appears, the ability to read the sacred books. Now those books were not in the same dialect as that which was commonly spoken. Isaiah wrote in Hebrew; Jesus and his contemporaries employed the Western Aramaic. Related as the two were, they were yet dissimilar. We are therefore justified in concluding, that Jesus had enjoyed not only a religious, but in a certain sense a learned education. How far the possession of the power to read the Scriptures in their original tongue may have tended to conciliate for him a favourable hearing from the members of the Nazarene Synagogue, may be gathered from the command over an unwilling audience gained by Paul, when at Jerusalem he spake to the 'men, brethren, and fathers,' in the Hebrew tongue (Acts xxii. 2), while the very effect produced, shows that the population even of the Metropolis might be addressed in a language different from that of their sacred books, in other terms, in Greek, the only other language in which according to the Mishna (Meguillah i. 8,) it was permitted to write such works.

In whatever language Jesus read the passage, he displays a familiarity

with the sacred writings of the Hebrew people. It is clear that he was well acquainted with the prophet Isaiah; for with no undue delay does he unfold the manuscript to the part where is written the passage which he desires to read, and which, before all other words in the Hebrew literature, set forth with exactness, force, and beauty, the burden with which he was charged.

These circumstances combined, afford a strong corroboration of the historical truth of the incident in question. The inevitable inference in favour of the divine mission of Jesus is not avoided by the supposition, (groundless in itself,) that the narrative is to be ascribed to the mere agency of the narrator. A narrator whose record bears these traces and tokens of reality, proves himself to have lived at least near the alleged events, to have dealt with realities, and to have possessed the inspiration ascribed to the subject of his biography; so that the objector gains merely a change of name, together with the additional difficulty of a narrative to account for, without any great personage to give occasion or possibility to its existence. It is far more likely that Luke wrote, because Jesus said and did these things, than that some fabricator cheated himself and others into the reception of an unhistorical or legendary figment. Let it also be observed with what adverse force the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah, thus made in the beginning of his ministry, bears on the hypothesis that our Lord learnt only by degrees, and avowed not till near the close of his life, that such was the mission he had to accomplish.

THE END.

RICHARD KINDER, PRINTER, GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

THE

POWER OF FAITH.

A Sermon,

PREACHED IN ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14TH, 1848;

BEING

THE TWENTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BY JOHN GORDON.

Γρηγορεῖτε, στήκετε ἐν τῇ πίστει, ἀνδρίζεσθε, κραταιοῦσθε.

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TO

THE REV. JOHN KENTISH,

THIS SERMON

IS DEDICATED,

IN TESTIMONY OF THE REVERENCE AND AFFECTION

FELT BY A SON FOR A FATHER

IN THE GOSPEL.

A SERMON.

MATTHEW XVII. 20.

"Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

Such were the words of the Son of God. They are mighty words. Mightier never fell upon the ear of man. We cannot read them or listen to them without being conscious of their power. They communicate the strength of which they speak. We feel that this must have been the influence they exerted when they were first uttered, and had nothing besides the force of Christ's character added to their own native truth to recommend them. But to us they come home with still further recommendations. They have been tried and found worthy in the circumstances to which they originally referred. The faith they were meant to inspire did operate in this very way. It overcame the most determined enemies, and surmounted the most formidable difficulties, and displayed a miraculous energy in subduing seeming impossibilities to its will. We, as to all that we reckon dearest, and noblest, and best,—in our civilization no less than in our religion—we are monuments of the

sober reality by which their enthusiasm was nerved. They answered to the calm sincerity of Jesus, while they expressed the hopes of his dauntless courage and his burning zeal.

It needs no depth of research to discover what the principle is on which this declaration rests. The power of faith arises from the authority of truth. The world reflects the character of its maker and governor; and therefore it is conformed, both as to its purposes and its means, to the absolute truth belonging to God. That truth constitutes the ruling principle of all events, though its influence is counteracted by other and opposite principles.

Our attention is so occupied by material things; we are so interested in the outward institutions of society; and the objects of sense absorb so large a part of our regard, that the inherent force of truth is but seldom estimated by us according to its merit. But it is nevertheless the great force of this world. It may not seem so at the present; but let any considerable period of time pass over, and its surpassing might, as compared with the agencies which at first threw it into the shade, will be clearly displayed. It is truth alone that lives from age to age: and as age after age rolls on, the changes which happen in human affairs exhibit it more plainly; establish it more firmly; and render it more effective and universal in its operation.

To secure its triumph, the mind of man, which is the great co-operating agent with divine Providence, has been made to correspond with it. Truth is at once the

influence by which that mind works and to which it yields. This influence is irresistible. Mind submits to it, according to its nature, as surely as matter submits to physical law. Nor is it a passive submission which is thus effected. Truth invigorates that which it subdues, and wherever it falls it germinates. The mind is a fruitful soil, and truth is an incorruptible seed.

Some may think that the progress of truth arises from the peculiarly happy circumstances with which it may be connected. But it is not so. One of the greatest advantages of this subject is, that truth can subjugate to its will the most unhappy circumstances. It is the spiritual constitution of man which furnishes the great security for its advancement. When the natural sympathy of the soul is excited in its favour, everything opposed to its spread will be successfully withstood, and such a condition and arrangement of events produced as will best contribute to its preservation and growth. The sophistry which was wont to lift up an impudent front of rivalry against it, will stand abashed and faltering in its presence. The prejudice which was deaf to its voice will be charmed by it into acquiescence. The interests which looked upon it as their foe, will apply to it for help. And as it gains to its side the heart of mankind, it will reorganize all human institutions, so that they shall express its character and fulfil its designs. What would be altogether impossible to be done by the first teachers of the truth in the removal of obstacles calculated to fill them with despair, becomes easy and necessary to be done, when, by not yielding to that despair, they

succeed in imprinting their teachings upon the minds of the multitude of their fellows. What no force of outward compulsion could, under any circumstances, bring to pass, is in the course of time surely and completely effected by the silent growth of the spiritual principles implanted in society. And what was regarded as an entirely visionary state of things, is, by the forward march of providential events, overtaken, and rested in as a fixed reality, having all the familiar application of nature itself.

Faith is the form in which truth possesses and is possessed by the spiritual faculties it affects;* and therefore faith is, by its very nature, armed with the power belonging to the principle with which it is identified—the one governing principle of all the affairs with which we have to do. It thus calls forth all the strength of him whom it animates to exertion: its efficacy is provided for in the moral constitution of those toward whom its efforts are directed: and those efforts are supported and advanced by the universal tendency of the circumstances in connexion with which they are made.

It has been emphatically by virtue of this power, that men have from time to time led the mind of society. It was the faith by which such men were distinguished above others that formed their special characteristic. They accomplished their mission, not so much by the depth of intellect or extent of knowledge they displayed, as by the fulness of the interest they took in the subjects to which they devoted them-

* Note A, p. 39.

selves. Those subjects were, in their case, made to occupy the whole man. It was weight of character rather than intrinsic superiority of thought which gave them authority upon mankind. They were, constitutionally, and by prescription, men of faith. The truth they administered had always been truth. Its discovery did not perhaps involve any elaborate investigation on their part. It might indeed have been coincident with the plainest thoughts and feelings of the human heart. But believing it—strongly and wholly believing it—they armed it, in their own persons, with a clearness of definition, and a weight of importance, which it had not before, and applied it with a persevering earnestness and zeal which made it effective upon mankind.

As it has been, so it will be. As others have found it to be, so shall we find it. "I believed, therefore have I spoken," was the simple rule of action which prevailed in the times of former triumph: and it will yet prevail. When we have "the same spirit of faith," we may rejoice in assured hope of the same victory. That which we speak, let it really be that which we believe; and to the full extent of the truth we hold, our word shall be, "as the fire that burneth the chaff; and as the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces."

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the power of faith is contained in the fact, that by virtue of it, the most fatal error may be made effective upon mankind. So fitted is truth to exercise authority over us, that its mere semblance—the appearance without the reality—if sincerely taken for the reality, will gather to itself a conquering influence, by means of the vigour appro-

priate to the subject whose form it assumes. Power cannot be divorced from faith, though truth may. It realizes the tale of that horrible being, who though in figure but a disgusting libel upon humanity, and endowed with life only by an impious imitation of the creative energy of God, was nevertheless possessed of a supernatural strength to destroy.*

When we attempt to bring such considerations as those which have just occupied our attention, to bear upon the subject of religion, we are frequently met by the declaration, that religious opinion is a matter of comparative indifference, and that all we have to do is to cultivate the mere sentiment of religion irrespective of the particular doctrines with which it may be united. The very definition of faith is altered to suit this view of the case. We are required to contemplate religious faith as an act by which we trust the sentiment within us, and not as an act by which we accept the truth proposed to us.

There are two things which are made to give support to this representation: the one is, the distinction existing between religion and theology; and the other is the fact, that the religious sentiment may be brought into vigorous operation under the influence of the most dissimilar opinions. Because religion and theology are different, the one relating to the feelings we cherish, and the other to the doctrines we hold, we are taught that the former may rightly engage our attention, while the latter is neglected; and because very contradictory

* The allusion is to the Demon of Frankenstein.

opinions are consistent with the cultivation of the religious sentiment, we are taught that opinion itself is but of little importance.

The fallacy of these conclusions may be easily detected.

It is quite true that a wide distinction of the kind pointed out, exists between religion and theology. Nay, it is still further true that theological knowledge and religious feeling do not commonly bear an exact correspondence to each other. They may, in opposite ways, be very disproportionate. But it does not, by any means, follow from this, either that the two can be entirely divorced, or that the disproportion between them is a favourable condition of things. The contrary is the case. Religion and theology are different; but they are also in some proportions inseparable; and that state is the best, in which the most perfect relation is established between them.

It is quite true, besides, that the most dissimilar opinions may be reconciled with an efficient operation of the religious sentiment. But it does not by any means follow from this, that the operation of the sentiment would not be improved by an improvement in the opinion. Much less is it to be taken for granted, that because a man, sincerely and earnestly believing what we think to be error, may exercise the pious fidelity appropriate to truth, therefore we can, for the purposes of such fidelity, make the same use of his error as we can of our own truth. The contrary is the case. It is with our own convictions and feelings that we have alone to do in this matter; and whatever others may

do with their convictions and feelings, we can only profit by, or live upon, what belongs to ourselves. We cannot step at will into the circumstances of others. We cannot have the comfort of their experience while we have no sympathy with the belief upon which that experience rests: and unless we cultivate that particular sentiment which harmonizes with our individual persuasion, it will be a mere pretence of sentiment to which we shall be committed.

In matters which concern the senses, man has to do with feeling alone. Pleasure and pain are the sole ruling principles in that department of human nature; and considerations of truth and error cannot be made to regulate the emotions belonging to the physical portion of our being. On the other hand, in matters which concern the intellect, man has to do with reason alone. Truth and error are the sole ruling principles in that department of our nature; and considerations of pleasure and pain cannot be applied to questions which are proposed to our understanding. Religion, however, does not belong to either of these departments of action. It is the moral portion of our nature which makes us capable of religion. Religion is the application of moral principle to the interests which exist between man and God.

Now, what is morality? It is a sentiment, a feeling. It acts upon us by means of the pleasure and pain in its favour, of which we are the subjects, though the pleasure and pain be of a nature peculiar to themselves. In this respect it corresponds with the conditions on which mere sensation operates. But, then, morality is not a sentiment only. The feeling appropriate to it is excited by

the truth and error of the subject to which it relates. This is its special characteristic. This gives to it its supreme elevation. It is a sentiment about right and wrong; and these things cannot be distinguished or described, but by an effort of reason upon them. They are essentially points of reason. They are pure intellectual conceptions. They correspond in this respect with the questions of opinion which appertain to the circle of interests over which the understanding and judgment preside. This is the case throughout the whole field of morality, and it applies as strictly to religion as it does to anything else possessed of a moral character.

Religion brings into exercise both the sensational and the intellectual part of our nature. Its sensations are originated by and dependent upon the rational conclusions we may form. To say, therefore, that religion is a sentiment, is, in reality, to throw no light at all upon the real question in dispute. It is a sentiment; but it is much more than a sentiment. It is a sentiment based upon a truth. It is the truth which gives rise to the sentiment. It is a sentiment about that truth. The sentiment could have no existence without the truth. The truth is its substance as well as its cause. Religion we cannot have, except in the form I have just stated; and therefore it is impossible for us to preserve any connexion with this subject at all, and yet accomplish the divorce between opinion and sentiment, which is frequently aimed at. The necessities of the subject will be sure to vindicate their own authority against all folly and sophistry.

A great deal may, nevertheless, be done to the injury of religion, as it exists and operates among men, by bringing it, as far as it can be brought, into a conformity to this sentimental theory. And what is the real purpose effected by such measures? It is this—that the purest, noblest exercises of which man is capable, those which are designed to exalt and expand his spiritual powers to the greatest possible degree, are brought as near as may be to the level of the lowest of his functions. Religion is reduced, or attempted to be reduced, to the principles on which mere sensation proceeds. This I firmly believe is the actual result of the experiment, as far as that experiment is successful. It cannot, as I have said, be entirely successful; but it may be partially so; and where that partial success occurs, the lofty heights of thought to which religion soars as its appropriate dwelling-place are forsaken for a mere flat of physical enjoyment.

Ask yourselves what is the specific form of religion in which the carrying out of the theory before us is seen to terminate. It is a form in which the sentiment in its purely spiritual application is superseded by the delights administered to the senses. Music, and painting, and incense, and architectural display—pomp, and ceremony, and show—these things rise, in the circumstances to which I am referring, into the principal means of religious excitement, and what little of doctrine is suffered to remain, becomes, under their influence, gradually assimilated to the outward appliances with which it unites itself. It puts off the robes of divine simplicity, sanctity, and glory, in which it descended from heaven, to assume the meretricious habits suited

to the mere earthly worship to which it is made to minister.

Mere sentiment, then, will not, in this department of human interest, supply the place of faith, taking faith in its common acceptation. Without the faith the sentiment cannot fulfil its own purposes. If it be our object to display anything like strength of effort in connexion with religion, it must be on the principle of my text that we do so. Faith, firm and earnest faith, in the truth which has been committed to our trust, will alone serve our turn. Nothing but the cultivation of this principle will arm us with the courage we want, and make us victorious over the obstacles with which we have to contend.

In order to set this matter in a clearer light, let us mark the difference which exists between faith and charity in their bearing upon the religious interests we may be able to forward. This difference needs to be marked, because it is frequently a point of indirect, if not of direct, recommendation, that the duties of faith should be superseded by those of charity.

It is true that charity is the great moral principle of social action; and on this account, if we have it not, though we have all faith, "we are nothing." It is true, also, that charity has very much to do in prescribing the right spirit and manner in which we ought to set ourselves to remove error from the world. It can soften existing differences, and produce indulgence in their favour, and thus contribute to the influence we may desire to exert upon society. All this and everything else of this kind it should be encouraged to do; but all this only provides

the favourable conditions under which opinion may spread. It does not supply the impulse to such spread. That impulse is communicated by faith. Between it and charity no comparison at all can be instituted in this essential respect. Truth has its own claims, which are independent of charity. Let us preach and practise charity, in its tenderest, freest, largest form; but let us do so as the servants, and, if need be, the soldiers, of truth. Concession is good, and indulgence is good; but, as they relate to opinion, they are only good in subordination to the paramount duty of faith. That duty is their law. To put charity in the place of this law, is, at best, the merest trifling with the case in hand: but where anything like knowledge of the subject exists it is the sign of indifference or dishonesty. Every generous exercise to which charity can prompt, should be brought into operation whenever we have to deal with the rights pertaining to liberty of thought, but it is a plain perversion of the office of charity to suppose that it will of itself perform that work of resistance which a religious reformation demands. To make it the ground of dependence for that purpose, is to leave the work undone. It is only under the guidance of faith that it will act at all toward this end; and it needs to be strengthened as well as to be directed by faith, in order that the end may be accomplished in connexion with it. To suffer the faith we entertain to be in the least degree silenced or overborne by the considerations of a peaceful accommodation, is just to provide for the defeat of our cause, as far as it is the cause of truth. Charity, in its legitimate application, relates only to the characters and

persons of men. With the nature and bearing of doctrine it has no concern. It is rational conviction, not kindly feeling, which ought to fix our determinations on that subject; and it would be easy to show that to defend and advance this subject on its own proper grounds is as consistent with the interests of charity as it is with those of truth.

There is another mode of helping out the difficulties of a case in which the exertion of religious influence is desired, that may demand a passing notice, as tending to disorder the relation in which we ought to stand to the principle enforced by the text.

When men become, from circumstances, aware of the deficiency and failure attaching to them in the promotion of any work of this nature with which they have been entrusted, and especially when they are brought into unfavourable comparison with others, in this regard, one of the first thoughts that strikes them is that their want of success has arisen from the want of those visible instrumentalities, which they see their more prosperous neighbours making use of. They turn their attention, therefore, to organization as that which is to remedy their evils.* This is a delusion, and in many cases it becomes a very dangerous delusion. If, in a spirit of imitation, they proceed to adopt the outward means of attraction and influence that are in operation around them, the great probability is that they will find such means altogether unsuitable to their purpose, and thus do increasing injury to the interests

* Note B, p. 40.

they desire to forward. Let us remember the warning which saith,—"No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment; neither do men put new wine into old bottles." The instrumentality which is fitted to the truth we hold will not merely be best chosen, but can only be wisely chosen at all, by the natural operation of the truth itself. When expressed in a living faith, that truth will create its own methods of action. It will do so without forced imposition or violent effort. If the spiritual principle be not wanting, the organization which it should animate will not be wanting either; and the cry for the latter is but a testimony to the absence of the former. In that relation, it is of use; and if it can succeed in rousing attention to the existing inward necessity, it will be the occasion of more than setting right the wrong of which it complains.

We, of all others, ought indeed to dread the mischievous effects of an artificial machinery, for the distinctive poverty of our ministry is to be attributed in no small degree to the forced measures which the benevolence of our ancestors devised for its supply.

The more a true faith is trusted, the better will it prove itself to be worthy of trust. It communicates no blind impulse to exertion, but manifests an enlightened capacity, as sagacious in the construction of its means as it is vigorous in the pursuit of its ends. In both respects it acts with the sureness of intuition itself.

What I have so far said has been intended to explain and vindicate the doctrine of my text, especially

as that doctrine relates to the general question of the maintainance and advancement of religion. I have now to make such an application of this doctrine as may be suitable to our particular circumstances, and the occasion of our present meeting together.

If faith can manifest its inherent power, in the manner I have attempted to describe, by virtue of its simple connexion with truth, how powerful beyond all calculation may it prove itself to be, when it takes under its administration such a system as that of Christianity! Christianity is by its nature and application fitted to call forth our faith to the greatest possible degree. To it the declaration of my text is emphatically appropriate; and it lays us under responsibilities which bring home that declaration to all of us as a matter of practical concern. It contains the perfection of the religious truth which God has made known to mankind; and by means of this truth it opens to us every blessing and glory which time or eternity can embrace. It places us in a state in which we can worthily co-operate with it in the fulfilment of the designs it unfolds to us. It is its grand work to strengthen the soul of man. Just as far as its purposes are effected in our individual cases, the mind rises above all that is low and feeble and pusillanimous, and exerts what power it has or can obtain, in the most decided form, and for the most important ends; and faith in the fulness of its life and vigour, as applied to the truth and holiness of the Gospel, becomes the great law of our action.

Christianity, however, stood in a somewhat different relation to those to whom the words of the text were

originally addressed, from that in which it stands to us. It was then a much simpler thing than it is now. It possessed a more obvious unity than it at present possesses. It existed but in one form; and the faith with which it was accepted was not divided or disturbed by different and contradictory representations of its teaching. The case with us is the opposite of this. Views of Christianity are taken by its adherents which are not only distinct from, but quite irreconcileable with, each other; and the Christian church is separated into sects which do not hesitate to assume a hostile position among themselves. Whatever modification of the doctrines of the Gospel we may adopt, we shall find ourselves face to face with those who dissent from our conclusions; and there is no exhibition, even of Christian principle, which can gain the universal assent of the Christian world.

Under these circumstances, it becomes matter of important inquiry, to what that faith which Christianity demands ought to attach itself? What ought to be regarded as the specific object of Christian faith? Should it be the general truth which is common to all Christians, or the particular convictions which we ourselves hold with respect to Christianity?

The right answer to this question is very easy to be found. When we think for a moment, that faith in any subject is what a man believes as to it—neither more nor less than that—it will surely be clear to us that it is Christianity, as we have received it, to which our Christian faith is due; and not a merely possible abstraction which we force into the place of our actual belief.

We do not at all compromise the Christianity of others when we act upon this conclusion. We are indeed bound not only to concede to them the liberty we ourselves take, but to regard their different views with the respect to which we feel our own entitled. What we do trenches upon no right or charity of social life. Its operation lies in quite another direction. Its peculiarity is, that it expresses a more enlarged idea of the character of Christianity itself, than that which is conveyed by the accommodating procedure opposed to it. Christianity is no more to be confined by a latitudinarian than it is by a bigotted narrowness. It extends its sympathy to each believer in the Gospel, not by virtue of his agreement with all the rest, but by virtue of his particular belief. It no more designs to soften down that belief to such an agreement, than it designs to give to it an exclusive portension. It takes it as it is. This it does in order to preserve in its integrity that principle of faith on which its interests are essentially based. Acknowledging that faith is, and only can be, an individual matter, it connects itself with its individual exercise, supporting and encouraging that exercise in its own case, in spite of the diversities to which it must necessarily lead. Thus it provides for that strengthening of personal character which I have already described as its object. In doing this it displays the wisest care for the general interests it has to advance. To make men individually faithful to their own conception of Christianity, drawing out in its favour all the power which faith in its most perspicuous form can possess—to bring them, in this manner, into earnest action with and toward each other on the

questions proposed to them by the Gospel, is to prepare most effectively for that supremacy of truth which cannot but be the result of the contention occasioned, and to produce unity of Christian persuasion, no less certainly than it produces vigour of Christian conduct. The lack, and not the superabundance, of freedom among us, is the great cause of our divisions and strifes.

This, then, is the relation in which we stand to Christian faith. It is faith in our own idea of Christianity that we have to uphold and apply in all the departments of Christian action to which we may be called. To bring this matter closely home to ourselves—if we are Unitarians, it is Unitarian Christianity which we have thus to regard. If this be indeed the form of our belief, we have not, and cannot have, with our present views, any other apprehension of Christianity than that which it implies. We may act dishonestly, or we may act unfaithfully, by our opinions; but it is an imperfect representation of the case which confines the unfaithfulness or dishonesty to the mere opinions themselves. With us they do not, and cannot, stand alone. We are bound, in all consistency, to identify them with the truth and power of the Gospel; and when we suffer ourselves to think lightly of, to treat with indifference, or to abstain from carrying out into strenuous conduct, the particular convictions we really entertain, we treat with indifference or abstain from carrying out Christianity itself. Upon us will lie not only the charge of neglecting our duty to our party or sect, or to any special sentiments we may profess, but the still more serious charge of departing from the obligations under which we are placed by the great revela-

tion of God's will as to the religious interests of the world.

I desire, above all things, that we should take this highest ground in the performance of the duty devolving upon us. But if we stood upon lower ground than this, if we were to put aside the grand fact, that to a Christian Unitarian, Unitarianism and Christianity are one, on all the points to which the Unitarianism relates, it would be still capable of the plainest proof, that the opinions themselves expressed by this word Unitarianism cannot, in a just estimate of the case, be regarded with anything approaching to indifference.

The rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, naturally draws after itself a rejection of the orthodox doctrine of the Atonement. Now, the abandonment of these two doctrines alone, gives a different, an irreconcileably different, view of the substance of the Gospel, as it concerns both God and man. The points of difference affect the questions of divine worship, and human salvation; and the whole field of Christian truth is occupied by the essential connexions in which those questions stand. The importance, therefore, of the opinions which mark our separation from the rest of the Christian world can scarcely be exaggerated, inasmuch as they present the widest possible variation consistent with a common Christian belief. He who denies to them this importance, must do so in a spirit of thoughtless ignorance, interested compromise, or sceptical laxity. Tell me, if you please, that worship and salvation are to be regarded as matters of poetic fiction. Tell me that, whether, holding this or the other theology, you do not think yourself bound to act upon

religious subjects with the same honesty as you apply to your worldly interests. These things I can understand. But, when you try to persuade me that, receiving Christianity as an eternal reality, and striving to clear my conscience toward it as in the sight of God, I may yet be insensible to the contrariety between two opposite views of its cardinal doctrines—you treat me as a fool.

If the principles which regulate this wide variation between Trinitarianism and Unitarianism are examined into, it will be found that the variation is no less important in its relation to the general interests of man, than it is in its relation to the Christian system.

I believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is mainly upheld because of the necessary support it gives to the doctrine of the Atonement; and that it is in the philosophy upon which the latter doctrine is based, that we are to seek for the great reason why orthodoxy is so tenaciously adhered to as it is. What is that philosophy? Is it not, that man's spiritual deliverance is a thing to be provided for him rather than to be wrought out by him? The distinctive idea of the Atonement is that of certain arrangements and provisions which alter the relations between man and God, irrespective of the conduct of mankind themselves. That idea diffuses its character over the entire scheme into which it enters. Now the question presented to us by this philosophy is important, vitally important, to the whole case of moral good with which we have to do. To my mind, such a philosophy shakes the very foundations of that good. It is not by the kind of means it contemplates that man can be benefitted at all in this department of his welfare; but by opposite

means—means which call forth the powers of his own nature, as the only instrumentality by which, under God's help, moral evil can be averted from him, and the blessings of truth and righteousness secured. We desire to maintain the full integrity of man's moral character in its religious applications, in order to preserve a consistency between the principle which regulates those applications, and that by which all other applications of a similar kind are regulated. We do this under the persuasion that we are following the direct guidance of Christianity in the matter; but we rejoice to see that the course in which we proceed is also the course of the civilization around us. Look, for example, at the manner in which provisions similar to those involved in the doctrine of judicial satisfaction are being dealt with in the world. The arbitrary principles which theology has in this form attributed to the divine government, are gradually ceasing to have connexion with human governments; and in all the social affairs of mankind, the inherent excellence and all-mighty strength of moral goodness are coming to supersede the false dependence which has been placed upon force or fear. As it was after the pattern of earthly tyrannies that the conceptions of the heavenly economy which we repudiate were framed, so it is likely to be by the growth of purer and nobler views concerning the temporal rights and benefits of man, that the conditions of his spiritual advantage will be understood, in a manner more nearly conformed to the simple revelation of God's truth and mercy, contained in the Gospel. Orthodoxy cannot survive the

shock of the tumbling thrones amid which its shrine was erected.

It can surely, then, be no matter of indifference with us, whether or not we should assist in advancing a cause, which, besides conveying our conceptions of Christianity itself, is thus distinct as to the representation of Christian doctrine it involves, and identical with the progressive improvement of society.

There is, however, another side of the case to which it behoves us to attend. Though our particular views of the Gospel are to us Christianity, they do not include the whole of Christianity, as it exists among the vast community of believers, who, equally with ourselves, have accepted the faith of Christ. Christianity, in its general meaning, expresses the world of thought and feeling which goes under that name; and it is incumbent upon us to cultivate the universal sympathy which that fact justifies and imposes. There are various ways in which this may and ought to be done.

The points of our belief should not be held by us in a merely philosophical form. With us they should be matters of Christianity, not of philosophy. They should take their shape, and tone, and application, from the connexion in which they stand to the divine truth and blessing, to whose harmonious expression we consider them to be necessary.

We ought not to suppose that the peculiarities of our faith are the only important, or indeed the only primarily important, points of the system with which they are connected. It should be our endeavour to

give to these characteristic points no more than their due value; and to add to them all that the most expanded survey of the revelation of which they form a part comprehends.

It should be with us no habit of thought to contemplate these peculiarities of belief in the controversial light in which they are so often placed. Against such a habit we have to guard ourselves. It is in their own positive truth that their great worth consists, not in their antagonism to the doctrines of others; and we shall have clearer and nobler ideas of their nature, and be able to use them to better effect when they are regarded by us in their native excellence, than when they are regarded only as instruments of opposition.

We should, at all times, keep our minds open to every beneficial influence which may be exerted upon us by the different forms of Christianity around us, howsoever erroneous we may think them to be. It would be absurd for us to imagine that we possess the whole truth; and those whom we may consider to be most in error, may, in some particulars, be wiser and better than we. For the reception of all that commends itself to us as wise and good, we should hold ourselves ready—we should look out for it, and avail ourselves of it—being prepared, not only to engraft it upon what we have, but to change our most cherished opinions, in obedience to the light which may yet shine upon us.

In one word, ours, while it is a firm and strong, should be an unprejudiced and generous faith—a faith which seeks for more strength by drawing nourishment from all the sources of gracious influence within its

reach ; and endeavours to grow up to the full proportions of a manly beauty and energy by the encouragement of every progressive tendency it possesses toward further truth and purer goodness.

To this sympathy of our Christian faith with the universal Christianity amid which it is exercised, we are especially invited by the circumstances under which our distinctive belief has been received. That belief has arisen and flourished among us without the enforcement or dictation of any creed. It has been the simple result of that freedom of thought which our ancestors connected with very different theological opinions from ours. Nothing of the nature of church authority has been employed to give to it impulse or restraint. This liberty, which our fathers transmitted to us, we have kept as our most precious treasure, and are determined still to keep. None shall take from us this boasting. And while, on account of the advantages which that liberty has so far conferred upon us, we look back to the past with gratitude to God, from whom this honour has come, we look forward to the future with hope in the same God, believing that the means by which we have been led into the more enlarged truth we possess, will conduct us into still better paths. To us, it would be shame indeed if we were not to avail ourselves of the greater good prepared to our hand, stimulated as we are by the very constitution of our religious fellowship, and the primary condition on which our present opinions are retained, to follow the guidance of the freedom which has been granted to us, as a duty which we owe to heaven.

It would be foolish to hide from ourselves the fact, that Unitarianism, both by its nature and its relations, possesses some tendencies to unbelief which require to be carefully watched. I state this as a fact, under the full conviction that it possesses at the same time greater facilities for the establishment of a firm and earnest faith in Christianity than any other form of Christian doctrine which does or can exist. It is, indeed, the very rationality of its system—that character by which it most commends itself to faith—which presents the strongest temptation to the abuse I am pointing out. The severe investigation by which its conclusions are commonly arrived at, and the rejection of popular dogmas which they imply, naturally create a habit of mind consistent with themselves. That habit, if it be not wisely regulated, may forbid the adoption of settled principles of trust in the subjects with which it concerns itself. This tendency is, moreover, encouraged by what I have before alluded to—the controversial position which Unitarianism is, under present circumstances, obliged to occupy. To support itself, it has to oppose what it regards to be the errors around it; and, in fulfilling this opposition, it has to withstand the great mass of the Christian world. By this means, the points of its faith are familiarised to its adherents chiefly in their negative form; and thus the spirit of objection which is likely to grow up with it under the most favourable auspices, is strengthened by the accidents of its situation. This state of things is rendered still more dangerous by the influence with which Unitarianism draws to itself numbers of persons whose only attach-

ment to it arises from the renunciation of orthodoxy it involves. Many fly to it for shelter merely because they wish to avoid the imposition of adverse opinions, and having little or no sympathy with its own distinctive tenets. Among them, almost all shades of unbelief may be expected to prevail.

To these causes, others might be added; and the operation of such causes is in this case the more to be dreaded, because the rationality which characterises Unitarianism deprives it, to a large extent, of other modes of support besides that supplied by simple faith. Systems of religion that demand adherence on account of the authority they exercise, or which connect the evidence of their truth rather with the testimony of the feelings than that of the reason, may continue to preserve their relation to their supporters when the legitimate grounds of belief in them are shaken; but this cannot happen with a system whose only true and professed ground of attachment is the rational proof which may exist in its favour. To take away the advantage of faith here, is to subvert the whole matter at its foundation, and to leave nothing for either devotedness to maintain or zeal to apply.

Thus, then, we stand:—Peculiarly exposed to unbelief, and yet more entirely dependent upon the pure assistance of faith than others are. Nor is it a mere theoretical danger which I am describing to you. Practically, as well as theoretically—in fact, as well as in apprehension—it is thus we stand. We have actually suffered, and we are now suffering, from this danger. It is, in my mind, the great cause of the evils over which we mourn, and of

the little success which attends our efforts. It is to this point that we have to direct our special attention, correcting the wrongs and remedying the deficiencies to which it has given rise.

Now I would not for one moment cherish the desire that the liberty of our religious associations should be in the slightest degree restrained, so that they should no longer afford shelter to all who desire to avail themselves of them for that purpose, however negative may be the motives which prompt to that choice. Nay, I should regard myself as a traitor to the cause of truth as well as liberty, if I shrank, here or elsewhere, from vindicating the equal religious rights—rights equal with my own—which belong even to those who reject the Christian name. I should consider it a perversion of Christianity itself to limit my religious sympathies to those whom the circle of the Gospel includes. But when I, believing Christianity to be the great power of God for the spiritual regeneration of mankind—when I, with a free and loving heart, do whatsoever justice and kindness can prompt me to do toward those who hold not my faith in Christianity—I expect them to act with the same equity and tenderness where my belief is concerned, as I am willing to display toward their unbelief. One thing, especially, I demand—that they should not compromise my Christianity by representing it as, or confounding it with, anything like a repudiation of Christianity. To them, this may seem a matter of small importance. Perhaps they may think that they are honouring me by attempting to identify my views with theirs. To me, however, it is of vital importance

that this should not be done. Between my retention of the Gospel, and my rejection of it, there is, to my mind, an infinite difference; and I would be judged on my own principles, not on those of another man. I ask for a generous treatment on this subject. He who thinks not with me, and feels not with me, on this the question, to me, of highest concern, should abstain from doing what may weaken in the least the strictly Christian position which I am of all things desirous of taking, and should estimate the character of all his efforts to advance his own views, by means of my influence, or under cover of my name, by what his conscience will tell him I, whose interests he is affecting, think of their character.

In order to set this matter right, we need not attempt to settle the dispute as to what is or is not Christianity.* About that we should perhaps differ, and we can afford to differ. But this has very little to do with the case. Whatever our differences in that regard may be, we can and ought to act toward one another in that kindly spirit which takes the view of this subject which is taken by those to whom our conduct relates; and makes that, and not our view as it differs from that, the rule of our action.

It is surely enough that those who labour in this Christian work should be visited with the uncharitable exclusion which other Christians practise against them; without their being exposed to the further hardship of seeing those who offer them help, plead guilty in their name to that which justifies the exclusion. This is, indeed, to be betrayed with a kiss.

* Note C, p. 41.

What, however, I have principally to urge upon this part of my subject applies not to those who are themselves disposed to yield to, but to those who, possessing a sincere and earnest faith in Christianity, are disposed to resist, the unbelieving tendency to which I have alluded.

Let me say, then, that it behoves us to fix in our minds certain points of essential worth, upon which, throughout all our investigation, and pursuit of truth, we may accustom ourselves to rely. It is thus that the service we owe to truth will be performed in the twofold application it requires. While we follow its guidance into the new fields it opens before us, we shall discharge the duty it prescribes to the principles with which it has already furnished us. There are landmarks which we have to observe in all the journeys into undiscovered regions we may be called upon to take. There are centres of thought from which all our researches should spring or to which they should tend. It is in the establishment of such principles as these, rather than in forming any minor convictions, that the work of faith consists; and as they are themselves, in the highest degree, the subjects of faith, so they give the character of faith to all with which they can be made to harmonize. They exalt what would otherwise be passing persuasions into matters of settled belief. This form of faith is emphatically necessary to the cultivation of religion. However proper it may be for us to "prove all things," it is in "holding fast that which is good," that exercises distinctively religious come into operation. The feelings of divine love, and

reverence, and obedience, cannot exist but in connexion with assured and satisfied reliance upon the facts and truths to which they have respect. Here lies our duty then. We have to keep our minds stayed upon the cardinal points of the subject with which we have to deal—those points which, in our estimation, involve the basis and outline of Christianity; and by their aid we shall be able to prosecute the work devolving upon us without fainting or fear.

But there is another duty we have to fulfil, of still greater importance than the one I have just noticed. We have to make the faith we profess, the habit of our lives. When we speak of faith in the religious connexions in which we have to do with it, we do not refer to such impulses of conviction as may produce extraordinary acts of courage and energy. These are to be looked for only in the case of those who are specially fitted for the work to be done, and at times of peculiar emergency. The faith on which we fix our expectations, is that which may be the possession of common men, and may exhibit its power under common circumstances. It should not wait for particular occasions of display; but should form all the conduct after its likeness. It should communicate its character to the universal thought and action of those it affects; and employ every available opportunity of manifesting itself in the exercises upon which it directly bears. It should not, for instance, permit the cultivation of religion to be confined to certain prescribed acts of public devotion, so that the rest of the life is passed as though those acts were exceptions to the ordinary demeanor:

but it should create at all times a marked difference between the general behaviour of its subjects, and that of mere men of the world; and should lead to the practice of private and social worship, just as it avails itself for that purpose of public occasions. If we were thus influenced by it, religious considerations would never be forced nor made to assume the appearance of force; but, on the other hand, they would never be absent from us. Our faith would use its appropriate instrumentalities, and work toward its proper ends with the simplicity and constancy of nature itself: and, entering into our very souls, would make us so submissive to its guidance that we should be unconscious of the temptations to inconsistency and unfaithfulness to which others yielded as uncontrollable. This is the kind of faith we want—a faith which stamps its image upon the character, and turns all the life to its service. Such a faith, diffused through a religious community, will make each member of that community an example of the power which my text attributes to this principle; and produce, in the walk and conversation of the whole, a continual exertion of that power, to its widest extent and in its greatest energy. If faith be thus ever present and ever active with us, throughout the universal circle of our feeling and conduct, adverse influences will be to it of no account. It will possess grounds of confidence which nothing but the dissolution of our moral and religious being can shake.

Let us, then, go forth into the several spheres of service which Providence has appointed to us, deter-

mined, wherever our lot be cast, to work the work, and fight the fight of faith

It is not merely because error prevails in the world that we are called upon thus to exert ourselves. The sin and misery of the world call upon us with a still louder voice.

Let us carry out the truth we profess in its universal bearings. Let us preserve it in its full integrity, make a practical application of it in all the circumstances with which we have to do, and extend its influence everywhere around us.

While we thus live and act, God will be with us—our guide and our defence, our strength and our salvation. He will reward us according to our righteousness, and establish and prosper upon us the work of our hands. His arm is not shortened that it cannot redeem, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: and he will deliver and bless his people as in the ancient days.

Those miraculous operations which we celebrate at this season, as marking the commencement of the Christian era, were designed to indicate the divine instrumentality by which Christianity is still, and must always be, diffused in the world. Miracles, indeed, it would be the height of folly and vanity for us to expect. Outward means opposed to, or different from, those employed in connexion with the common order of nature, God no longer makes use of. But there is still an agency of the Almighty distinct from physical causes, though not acting contrary to them or superseding them, by which he accomplishes the purposes of his will.

With reference to that agency, it was said, when the Pentecostal shower of heavenly influence fell from above, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." That promise brings the words of the text personally home to us, as though we heard them from the lips of the Saviour himself. It makes us partakers in their divine as well as their human application.

"Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

NOTES.

NOTE A.

I INFER from what has been said to me, that some of the expressions which I have used in the course of this sermon are calculated to convey a more limited idea of the nature of faith than I really entertain. I wish it to be understood, therefore, that I do not consider faith to be merely an intellectual exercise, nor do I confine the truth it embraces to that which may be supported by external proof. The mind of man possesses the power of apprehending universal truths, which contain in themselves their own evidence, and with the apprehension of such truths as these, religion is most intimately connected. Faith, too, cannot by any means be said to have fulfilled its proper work, when it has only accepted the truth to which it refers: its power is especially shown in the trust to which it gives rise. I believe all I have said will be found to be quite reconcilable with these views; but it did not come within my plan to introduce them so prominently as other views were introduced. I felt it to be my more immediate duty to insist upon the fact that faith is, in all possible cases, based upon an intellectual exercise. Such exercise is essential to it, whatever be the character of the truths it embraces, or whatever be the nature of their evidence. It is in the conviction of truth that it commences its operation; and though it proceeds to manifest its power by the conformity of feeling it produces, it is from its connexion with truth that this power is derived.

"In our present state," says Coleridge, "it is little less than impossible that the affections should be kept constant to an object, which gives no employment to the understanding, and yet cannot be made manifest to the senses. The exercise of the reasoning and reflecting powers, increasing insight, and enlarging views, are requisite to keep alive the substantial faith in the heart. In the state of perfection, perhaps, all other faculties may be swallowed up in love, or superseded by immediate vision; but it is on the wings of the CHERUBIM, i.e. (according to the interpretation of the ancient Hebrew doctors) the *intellectual* powers, and energies, that we must first be borne up to the 'pure empyrean.'"—*Aids to Reflection.*

NOTE B.

I was represented at the meeting which was held immediately after the delivery of my discourse, as having spoken against organisation itself as a means of religious influence. I need not point out to the readers of the passage referred to, that my meaning was in this respect mistaken. I gladly avail myself, however, of the occurrence of the mistake, to state more precisely what that kind of organisation is to which I object. So far from repudiating organisation, I think our churches are suffering deeply from the want of it. There are, however, two ways of supplying this want. One is, by suffering the principles we hold to decide the forms of our organisation; and the other is by adopting those forms which exist in connexion with different principles from ours. Against the latter course of procedure, we have some reason, I think, to be on our guard. We need, for instance, a more efficient church-connexion than we at present have; but that need will not be properly met by any attempt to unite our churches together on the basis of an acknowledgment of a common creed. This is a kind of union generally prevalent around us; but every approach to it ought to be withstood on our part, as contrary to the religious liberty we have set ourselves to maintain. We need, again, that our modes of exhibiting religion should be improved; but that need will not be properly met by conforming the outward means of devotion to a pattern taken from systems which have no sympathy with the peculiarities of our faith. Something, it is true, may be beneficially done in counteracting the exclusively rationalistic tendencies of that faith; but it should come from within, not from without. It may be right and laudable to erect beautiful temples, and introduce into them every means of sensible attraction; but while the support of the ministry among us is not sufficiently provided for, and due attendance upon the services of the sanctuary is not given, it may be feared that the value of religious worship and instruction is not estimated to the extent that such efforts in favour of external respectability would indicate. A true faith does not neglect that which tends to the glory of its object; but it fulfils the substantial duties required from it under the impulse of a moral necessity.

NOTE C.

When I wrote the sentence to which this Note is appended, I was not aware that the question I was touching upon possessed the kind of interest I have since heard attributed to it. It seems, however, that some irritation of feeling exists among us as to the point of withholding the Christian name from persons who reverence the character and receive the moral teachings of Jesus, but who do not believe the truth of the miracles he is said to have wrought. I am not acquainted with any facts connected with the administration of Unitarianism which, to my mind, justify this irritation. As far as I know, the constitution of our churches does not forbid any one, whatever his opinions may be, from availing himself of the religious fellowship we cultivate. The practice adopted is, I believe, consistent with the theory professed. Every individual who seeks for such fellowship is himself made the sole judge of his own fitness for participating in it. What opportunity there can be, under such circumstances as these, for one party among us to refuse the Christian name to another, in any sense which should occasion personal offence, I am at a loss to understand. My perplexity is the greater, as I am unwilling to believe that any advocate of religious liberty would take offence at declarations, however plain, and however different from his own views, which were simply intended to convey the idea of Christianity entertained by the individuals who made them. It would be an act of moral cowardice on the part of those who are entrusted with the work of religious instruction to abstain from making such declarations, in deference to the opposing ideas of those with whom they are connected; and if it could be meant, by one who complains of the Christian name being withheld from him, merely that representations of Christianity are insisted upon from the pulpit, which are essentially irreconcileable with his anti-supernaturalistic notions, the complaint ought to be met in a spirit of indignant resistance.

For myself, I do not feel at all anxious to press upon others any abstract definition of what, as far as belief is concerned, constitutes a Christian. I would much rather leave the truth to manifest itself practically, as it will do, by the natural conflict of opinion on the subject of Christianity. I am, however, anxious explicitly to state, on all proper occasions, my own views of Christianity, in order that they may not be confounded with anything which I deem erroneous relating to so vitally important a subject. I cannot, therefore, refrain from offering a

remark or two upon the kind of belief for which the designation of Christian is claimed in the instance alluded to.

I am told, then, on good authority, that there are persons who profess to believe that Jesus Christ did not make any pretension to miraculous operations, and who yet receive the accounts we have concerning him as furnishing an authentic representation of his character and teaching. Now, I am quite unable to discover any rational ground for the belief which has been thus described. It seems to me to be palpably absurd,—so absurd, indeed, that I cannot resist the conjecture that it must in most instances be adopted in a spirit of mere accommodation, without any serious investigation into the subject having been instituted. I have in my possession all the records relating to Christ which the persons who profess this belief have; and these two things appear to me very clear from the perusal of them. First, that no process of fair criticism will support the conclusion that Christ did not pretend to work miracles; and, secondly, that no adequate idea of his character and teaching can be obtained if the miracles attributed to him be rejected. These things seem to me so plain that I should hardly think it worth while to dispute with a person who denied them.

Under these circumstances I am persuaded that very few, indeed, can really entertain the kind of belief on which I am remarking. I think it would be generally found, on examination, that the description of this belief which I have quoted, did not accurately answer to the facts of the case. The probability, to my mind, is, that the miraculous pretensions of Christ are arbitrarily renounced, not that any evidence is obtained to produce the conviction that he did not make such pretensions: and I think it equally probable that the exalted views of his character and teaching which are held, do not arise merely from the natural events related in the Gospels, but from transferring the moral representations conveyed in his supernatural works to purely imaginary circumstances.

Now to this mode of dealing with the subject I have the strongest possible objections.

It involves an entire perversion of the character of the New Testament, reducing it from an authentic record of facts to an instrument which may be made to express just what the parties who employ it choose.

It involves an exceedingly imperfect idea of the work of Christ, taking away from it its primary element, the personal exhibition of Deity which it embraced.

It involves, moreover, a complete destruction of Christianity in any definite form, making it to assume all the changes which may adapt it

to the infinite variety of opinion prevalent from time to time in the world.

For such reasons as these I have no hesitation in saying that the lesson of generosity which I felt it my duty to urge upon those who, though connected with Unitarianism, had no settled faith in Christianity, applies to the conduct which ought to be pursued with regard to the supernatural claims of the Gospel. The utmost carefulness should be exercised by all parties that the belief in those claims which has hitherto characterised the administration of Unitarianism, and which must continue to characterize it if it is to retain a Christian form, may not be compromised. Considering the importance of this belief to those who entertain it, the persons who have no sympathy with it would act far more honourably in forming fresh religious associations more consistent with their own views, than they will do in employing their present alliance with Unitarianism for the promotion of purposes opposed to such belief. It behoves them in the relations they sustain, not only to regard the interest of their own opinions, but also to regard the interest of opinions pre-eminently dear to those with whom they have united themselves, and at least to forbear from giving to the latter a representation which would be considered by their advocates erroneous or injurious.

THE END.

Printed by Richard Kinder, Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

A Sermon,

PREACHED ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 30th, 1849,

BEFORE THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

At its Annual Meeting,

HELD IN ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON.

BY

J. SCOTT PORTER,

JUNIOR MINISTER OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION, BELFAST.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

THE PRAYER OFFERED IN THE INTRODUCTORY SERVICE,

BY

SAMUEL BACHE,

MINISTER OF THE NEW MEETING, BIRMINGHAM.

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PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD! the Fountain of all goodness and perfection, we come into Thine immediately acknowledged presence with thankful hearts, to adore Thee for Thy mercies, to bind ourselves anew to Thy most holy service, and to cherish within our inmost souls the conviction of Thine infinite and inexhaustible love. How great is our privilege in being thus permitted to hold sacred communion with Thee! Though we see Thee not, yet Thou art ever nigh to uphold, protect and bless us. Though our limited powers cannot comprehend the fulness of Thy glory, yet through its reflection in the face of Christ Jesus our Lord, we are enabled to know Thee as a Being of infinite power and holiness, of unerring wisdom, and unchanging goodness and truth.

We bless Thee for the manifestations of Thy fatherly providence which shine around our daily path; for life and health, activity and enjoyment; for means and opportunities of usefulness and improvement; for our various social relations, and the affections which they are designed to exercise; nor less for those trials and chastisements which are mercifully ordained to prove and strengthen our spiritual energy, to correct our negligence, to bring us back from our wanderings, and create within us a clearer and more habitually actuating sense of our obligations and destiny.

Lord! what are we, and what are our merits, that we should thus become the objects of Thy continual care and kindness! Thou hast nourished and brought us up like children, but we have sinned against Thee. Thou art evermore preventing us with Thy benefits, yet are we too often unmindful of the gracious hand from which all our blessings flow; and, eager in the pursuit of worldly desires and aims, neglect the holy lessons which our daily experience of life is adapted to teach us regarding Thy providence and will. What thanks, then, do we not owe Thee, O Thou Father of our spirits, that Thou hast interpreted and sanctioned all these silent admonitions of Thy providence, by the living voice of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. Blessed be Thou, O God, for his words of truth and grace, for his clear precepts of duty, for his sublime utterances of devotion, for his enlarged and comprehensive law of charity, and especially for that most persuasive language of his life whereby he has given reality to all his other instructions, and set the seal of sincerity on all his other claims to our reverence and obedience. Teach us to hearken to his divine instructions, to copy after his spotless example, to imbibe his holy and benevolent spirit, and to cherish within our inmost souls those heavenly desires and aspirations which confirmed his faithfulness and animated his zeal in the service of Thee and of his race.

As members of Thy human family, we pray to Thee, the one God and Father of all, that Thy paternal providence, enjoyed by all, may be by all acknowledged and adored. Dispel the dark night of ignorance, superstition and sin. May the beams of the Sun of Righteousness arise on all the nations of the earth, and by their life-giving power awaken within the soul of every child of God, the spirit of filial reverence, confidence and joy. Bless us as a nation. Largely do we share Thy goodness, O Thou that

rulest among the kingdoms of men, in the peace and quietness which are our happy portion, while strife and tumult rage among so many other nations of the earth. Grant that we may fear Thee and Thy goodness, improve our national and social privileges, and maintain with an increasing diligence and fidelity those principles of righteousness and peace on which Thine own all-gracious government rests. O God! bless our Queen, and all our Legislators and Rulers. Keep them ever mindful of their account to Thee, the Lord of lords, and of their obligation to promote the welfare and happiness of those whom they govern. Bless all who labour for the maintenance and diffusion of Thy sacred truth, by whatever name distinguished, who labour in a spirit worthy of its character. May the Gospel of peace promote peace; may the truth be maintained in love; and may love unfeigned incite all who confess it, to an earnest and unswerving maintenance of the truth. Pour down on all Christian congregations and their ministers the healthful spirit of Thy grace. May they grow up together under its influence, in the fear and love of Thee, in spiritual fellowship with each other, and with thy Son, Jesus Christ. Bless this present assembly of Thy worshipers, and the Society whose interests we are now met together to promote; since we are united to glorify Thee as the only true God, through Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Bless our endeavours to maintain and diffuse the faith in which we ourselves rejoice. May we never be ashamed of it, never dishonestly conceal it; but profess with our mouths what we believe with our hearts: that thus Thy kingdom may come, and Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thine is the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

A SERMON.

MATT. v. 13:

"Ye are the salt of the earth. But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men."

IT is not necessary to consider very minutely the substance here spoken of as "*salt*." Our common salt it evidently could not be; for that, though it will readily deliquesce, if exposed to moisture, will not lose its saltness, unless it be chemically decomposed. Our Lord manifestly speaks of a different substance, perhaps an earthy deposit found upon the shores of the sea,—richly impregnated with its salts, and in that state employed in agriculture as a fertilizer, but capable of losing them by exposure to the atmosphere, and with them the chief portion of its own usefulness and value. The expression no doubt was proverbial, for we meet with it several times in the Gospels: and it deserves to be remarked that wherever the use of this evanescent "salt" is spoken of, none is mentioned except its application to the soil. Thus Luke xiv. 34, 35, "Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? *It is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill:* but

men cast it out."* These observations enable us to catch the exact meaning of our Saviour's metaphor. The world is a mighty field, awaiting and requiring careful moral culture. The disciples of Christ are "the salt of the earth,"—or rather the salt of the land,—*the land-salt*. The hearts which have been penetrated by the sacred truths of the Gospel, which have been united to the Saviour by a lively faith, a fervent love, a willing obedience, and a zealous imitation,—those spirits that have been enlivened, warmed and purified by the blessed influences of his teaching, his life and his death, resemble the substance which has just been described. In combination with much that, alas! is earthy, weak and unprofitable, they carry within them a purifying and fertilizing principle, calculated to destroy the weeds of error and of sin; to

* Of the ancient commentators, Jerome is, I think, the only one who remarks that the allusion in Matt. v. 13 is borrowed from agriculture; and he immediately contradicts himself by asserting that salt is of no use except as seasoning, and as a preservative of meat. Grotius, Wetstein, Kuinoel, Bloomfield, and a whole host of other writers, conceive that the reference is to salt as a condiment.—As to the substance itself, Macknight cites Maundrell in proof that rock-salt, exposed to the atmosphere, loses its savour, but retains its usual form and appearance. I apprehend that the salt described by the tourist as having undergone this change, could not be pure. That a substance answering to the general description which I have given, is actually found upon the shores of the Dead Sea, is evident from Robinson, *Biblical Researches*, Vol. II. p. 226; but it does not seem to be, at present, employed as manure. Yet that salt, in small quantities, is of use in increasing the fertility of land, is an opinion which, though now generally discarded, could boast the support of Sir John Sinclair. I have seen damp seashore sand removed in carts, to be spread upon the fields. In a dry soil like that of Palestine, a minute proportion of salt might be of service by attracting moisture from the atmosphere: but all that we are concerned with is to determine the meaning of the proverb; its foundation is quite a different question, and of little comparative importance.

develop the latent germs of piety, holiness and charity; to sustain and nourish the spiritual life of the world. All true followers of Jesus occupy a missionary post; they do so of necessity: it is the very condition of their being such. So long as Christians cherish the virtues of heart and life which their profession implies, they retain their high pre-eminence, and fulfil the duties of their lofty calling; they are the "salt" that fertilizes the soil of humanity, and prepares it for producing abundant fruits of holiness and righteousness. They are "lights" that shine in a dark world, attracting the spirits of men, guiding them to the Gospel, to the Saviour and to God. Their gifts are blessings to others as well as to themselves;—to all, indeed, who, "seeing their good works," are led by the persuasive power of admiration and example to "glorify their Father who is in heaven." But when the spiritual graces, without which there is no real Christianity, are no longer to be found in the persons who assume the Christian name,—when worldly follies, passions, vices and corruptions, are perceived to exist in the hearts and to reign paramount in the characters of men who call themselves disciples and followers of Jesus,—they have then forfeited their high prerogatives. The "gold is changed, the fine gold is become dim." The "lamp" is quenched or placed where it can give no light. The "salt has lost its savour, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."—Such Christians no longer live for the benefit and improvement of mankind. They are worthless in themselves; and worthless, or rather pernicious, to the race to which they belong.

I do not mean to dwell upon this idea; but I cannot dismiss it without expressing my regret, and, I am persuaded, that of all true lovers of the Lord Jesus, that there are apparently so few Christians who are fully alive to this

social importance of their own religious character and state. It would be well for the world, were all Christians to consider themselves as in one sense invested with a *public* and even with an apostolical character;—were they to reflect that Christianity has still its progress to make and its work to perform, at home as well as abroad,—in our own country as well as in foreign lands,—in our own neighbourhoods and families as well as in remoter districts. It were well for ourselves and for our brethren too, were all of us who "name the name of Christ," to remember that our demeanour, temper and daily walk of life,—our conduct and our very words,—form a part of that machinery of causes and effects, by which the growth of pure and undefiled religion not only may be, but necessarily will be, either advanced or retarded in a circle of perceptible extent. It ought to be present to the minds of Christians, in their homes, in their churches, in the world, in their business, in their amusements even, that they are the "salt" of the earth. "But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

But I mean to make a narrower and more particular application of this subject, with especial reference to the objects of that Institution whose concerns have this day drawn us together.

Our Lord's language may be considered as addressed with peculiar force to any class of persons who stand up before their brethren in the attitude of religious reformers. Men who feel themselves called upon to record a public protest against what they regard as prevalent error, and to offer to their brethren's acceptance what they consider a purer faith and a more sanctifying rule of life, than those which are

put forth by other churches, are, in their own conception at least, placed in circumstances very closely corresponding to those of the persons addressed in the text. And as their feeling of obligation, and to a certain extent their obligations themselves, must flow from their own views of their position, and not from the views of others, they ought to feel themselves bound to pursue, constantly and faithfully, that course, which,—so far as they can judge by Christian prudence and experience,—may be expected to lead most directly to the advancement of those principles which they esteem so valuable and important. Be they right or be they wrong, they cannot but regard themselves, in reference to these principles, as, to a certain extent, "the salt of the earth." And having a mission to fulfil on which, according to their conception, so much of good to humanity depends, they are bound to be exceedingly circumspect and careful that this "salt lose not its savour,"—that their souls be strung up to the pitch of the high duties to which they are called,—that their lives, their characters, their hearts, correspond with the position which they have occupied, and the attitude which they have assumed.

As this point can hardly stand in need of farther discussion, I proceed to observe that, at the present day, Christian Unitarians generally, and more especially those of us who have enrolled ourselves among the supporters of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and of other Societies having a similar aim, stand in this attitude and occupy this position, before our brethren of other churches and denominations. We have associated ourselves together as a body of believers anxious to bring back the general church to some original principles of the Gospel of Christ, from which we believe it has widely wandered;—to clear the faith of Christians from corruption and error, which we

believe to have accumulated around it in darker ages;—and to present that faith once more to mankind, in its freedom, in its simplicity, in its native power and holiness, from which we conceive that men have widely, though unconsciously, deviated. We may be mistaken in all this, for we claim not to be infallible; but such at least is our opinion. In particular, we think that, in many churches, the liberty of Christians to search the Scriptures, to study their contents, to investigate their doctrines, in the uncontrolled exercise of their own hearts and understandings upon the evidences of religious truth, and to profess the doctrines which, after such inquiry, they believe to be true, has been interfered with, denied, denounced, trampled on. We believe that some of the most important doctrines which the Son of God delivered, in reference to his Father's supreme dominion, sole deity and essential mercy, have been much obscured, if not altogether lost from sight, in the speculations of men upon subjects which they confess they cannot understand; but on which they lay down definitions and decrees, at variance, as it seems to us, both with scripture and reason; and require our assent on pain of exclusion from God's favour here and hereafter. We believe that similar misconceptions prevail respecting the person, office and work of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and his relation to the Father who sent him; and respecting the Holy Spirit. And we are of opinion that many of the doctrines held by the majority of Christians respecting the nature, character and destiny of man,—the grounds of his acceptance with God, and the connexion between holiness here, and happiness in the world to come,—are quite at variance with the hopes, the promises, the consolations which were held forth to the world by our Saviour in his teachings, and by the holy apostles and evangelists in their writings. We believe that these misconceptions have exerted

a most unfavourable influence upon the moral and spiritual condition of mankind, and have reacted very perniciously upon the reception and progress of the Christian religion itself. We cannot be indifferent to the prevalence of such misconceptions; and therefore we stand forward in a missionary character, and hoist the standard of reform. In order that we and our brethren of sentiments akin to ours may be enabled more effectually to carry on this great work, the present Association was formed. And it is right that we compare, from time to time, our conduct as its members, with those duties which are incumbent upon us in that capacity; lest there be something in ourselves which will obstruct all the efforts we may make for the promotion of what we look upon as sacred truth; lest "the salt may lose its savour, and thereby become good for nothing."

I shall now proceed to point out some circumstances which, if found to prevail extensively among us, must impede, and may even, for a season, prevent the progress of our religious doctrines in the world. I shall try to make my remarks as applicable as I can to the present aspect of society: but I must warn all who hear me, that I throw out these observations as aids to reflection and self-examination merely. I do not mean to say,—I dare not say, that some of the evils to which I mean to call your attention exist among us; far less, that they are found in a greater degree with us than with our brethren. How far they exist in us, each one must determine for himself. But he who cannot take my remarks to himself as a reproof, may perhaps be able to profit by them as a warning.—Another caution which I think it fair to premise at the outset, is, that I do not profess now to consider *all* the obstacles to the spread of Unitarianism; but merely a few

of those which either exist or may arise in Unitarians themselves; and which they have it in their power to remedy as often as they recur, by the exertion of their own will.

Such obstacles may arise either from the ungodly lives of Unitarians;—from their want of zeal;—or from their improper manner of advocating their views.

I. It cannot be denied that those who assume the office of religious reformers, ought to be themselves religious men:—not merely men of clear, cool and sagacious heads, though such are very useful and necessary in the work;—but men too of pious, benevolent and earnest hearts; whose daily walk and conversation form "an epistle known and read of all men;"—men who know the truth and love it, because it hath "made them free" from the servitude of sin and death, and given them the victory over the world. In such hands, the cause is likely to prosper, if in any hands it can. Now if Unitarians generally be characterized by these qualities;—if they are, and are known to be, among the most pious, humble, spiritually-minded, unworldly, unselfish, unpretending of the community;—if they are not the slaves of mammon, but the servants of God;—if they are pure in their hearts and pure in their lives, and so by their virtues shed a moral lustre around the religious doctrines which they profess,—the cause may be expected to make progress. It will attract to itself, in time, the sympathies of the good, the wise, the upright, the faithful and the true. Those who love God, and who love the Lord Jesus,—seeing that we are under the influence of the same feelings,—will love us for their sakes. Their aversion to our principles, so far as it arises from mere prejudice, will abate; and, holding our religious characters in respect, they will be better prepared for an im-

partial examination of our doctrines, and perhaps may in time see reason to adopt them. Even the sinful, the worldly and the depraved, cannot but reverence a system of faith which counteracts their own unruly passions, and delivers men from the power of vices by which they are themselves held in subjection. But if Unitarians, instead of being "followers of God as dear children," are the votaries of the world, the votaries of its vices, its passions and its lusts;—if they are the slaves of appetite and mammon;—if they take no interest, at least no active interest, in the concerns of their fellow-men,—make no exertion to reclaim the sinful, to instruct the ignorant, to succour the distressed,—or only just so much interest as serves to gain for themselves a character for benevolence, or simply prevents them from being set down in the list of the utterly selfish and hard-hearted;—if they take no pleasure in the contemplation of God or in the exercise of piety;—count every moment spent in such employments as so much time lost,—lost either from the heavy, engrossing cares of business, or the equally engrossing pursuits of folly and dissipation,—if these be the Christian Unitarians, and these be the marks and tokens by which they are known,—what can we say but that their "salt hath lost its savour"? What can we expect but that a cause, so dishonoured by its own pretended friends, should go down and down and down in public estimation? Could we ourselves deny that if such be the fruits of Unitarianism, it deserves to sink and die?

My Christian brethren, let me here recall the caution which I addressed to you a few minutes since. I do not say that these are the characteristics of Unitarians. Blessed be God, I know many cases which would confute any such imputation. Were it otherwise, I should hardly be standing here. But suffer from me the word of warning and exhortation. Let me especially advert to the prevailing

dangers of the present time,—the love of riches and the pursuit of pleasure. Many new methods of attaining both have been found out of late years, and multitudes have thrown themselves into the chase after these things, with an eagerness which has overleapt the restraints of conscience and honour, the laws of man and God. May it be the honest boast of our denomination that our young men have escaped "the corruption which is in the world, through sensual lusts;"—that our old men have put their trust, "not in uncertain riches, but in the living God;"—and that both young and old are living unto God, and not unto the world,—unto Jesus and him crucified, not unto themselves,—unto eternity, not unto time. When we can feel that this praise is fairly ours, we may indeed look forward to the growth and continual progress of our cause.

II. A second cause which may hinder the success of our endeavours, is want of hearty zeal in the enterprize. A missionary undertaking, to produce any useful result, must be carried on with a truly earnest spirit. And if it be directed towards a right object, conducted in a becoming manner, and by men who are themselves impressed with the value of the truths which they promulgate, and on that account anxious to recommend them to the acceptance of their brethren,—it will seldom fail to produce some good effect. Whereas if we ourselves are cold and languid,—if we are doubtful as to the advantage which society would gain by the adoption of the principles which we recommend,—if we are willing to sacrifice nothing of our ease, our social respectability, our worldly prosperity, our time, our money, or just as little as we can possibly help, in order to assist in their diffusion,—it is quite natural that they should make but little way. We treat them as if we thought them of small consequence to mankind; and man-

kind will naturally fall into the same opinion. For a faith so recommended, they will not feel themselves under any obligation to forsake their worldly interests, nor even to give up their old habits and connexions: in very few cases will they think it needful to take even the trouble of asking what it is, or what it is good for. If we take no pains about it, neither will the world.

In this respect a remarkable change seems to have come over the spirits of some in our Unitarian denomination. There was a time among us when the members of our body were in general inspired by a missionary spirit, and testified an earnest wish to do all that was possible to promote the progress of truth, both directly and indirectly. If any one whose position called upon him to be active in this work, seemed to be remiss, he had to defend himself as best he could from the imputation. But now the case is so far altered, that the express promulgation of the Unitarian doctrine is by many among us condemned as a manifestation of a sectarian spirit; even the use of the Unitarian name is thrown aside by some as the evidence of a narrow mind and a confined theology; and those who are for adhering to such Societies as the present, encouraging the labourers, and assisting in the work, are frequently put upon the defensive, and compelled to employ, in meeting the objections of their brethren in the common faith, the time and the energies which would otherwise have been devoted to labours for its diffusion.

I am now speaking of persons who are really Unitarians in heart and sentiment; who hold the form of doctrine commonly received among us; and have no wish nor desire to abandon it in fact, even when they give up the use of its name to designate their religious views. I cannot but regret most deeply the conclusion to which they have come. Of course I speak without the least desire to question their

motives. Their characters would repel any such attempt. I am aware that many among them imagine that by acting in this manner they take the best means of spreading the Unitarian faith,—silently, unobservedly,—but, as they expect, effectually, in society; while, at the same time, they conceive that they are enabled to labour more successfully for the promotion of other moral and social reforms. But what man of independent mind would consent to take a part in labours, even for the most important plans of social improvement ever yet proposed,—whether on behalf of temperance, education, slave-emancipation, or for whatever other end,—on the degrading condition of renouncing all zeal for what he holds to be religious truth, and even of discarding the simple adoption of its name? And how can any reasonable man lead himself to imagine that by so doing he takes a sure way to advance its progress? Not for a moment questioning the sincerity of those who take this view, I must not conceal my own opinion, that if their course were generally adopted among us, our cause, instead of advancing, would retrograde, and that rapidly. An open avowal and advocacy are essential to the propagation of any doctrine, involving an important change in the minds of men. Without this, "the salt" will truly "have lost its savour; and thenceforth it becomes good for nothing."

Not such aid, not such defenders, do the present times demand. All around is life, activity, earnest enterprize. He must have looked with a superficial glance on society as it now presents itself, who cannot see that this is no time for timidity, lukewarmness, supineness. Most hearty and energetic are the efforts now in progress among our fellow-christians for bringing the knowledge and the influence of the principles which they hold, home to the mind and the heart of every member of the community, if it be possible. Let us, while we cordially admire and approve the zeal by

which they are actuated, take pattern from their conduct, and imitate their good example. And let us farther consider, that if we relax in our exertions now, we shall not only make no advance in the inculcation of the truth, but inevitably fall into a more backward position than we have hitherto occupied. When all are competing in a race, he who will not exert himself is thrown behind, distanced by those with whom he was formerly on a par. There is nothing for us now but life, energy, activity. If we fold our hands and compose ourselves to slumber, we sleep the sleep of death. Relax our zeal, and our salt becomes utterly savourless, useless, good for nothing. But this very earnestness of spirit in which the efforts to which I have alluded owe their existence, is an encouraging circumstance to those who labour to enlighten and instruct the human race. I believe there never was a time when more sincere and thoroughly inquiring search was made after religious truth. The movements which are taking place in different churches around us, Established and Dissenting, shew that men are becoming dissatisfied with old opinions, examining the foundation of the creeds in which they have been educated, renouncing as prejudices doctrines formerly revered as sacred truths, and adopting other principles in their stead. Now, then, is the time to be active and energetic, to keep our religious convictions in the light, to place our lamp upon its candlestick and cause its light to shine before men. If we miss the favourable opportunity which these circumstances afford, we may wait in vain to see such another in the lifetime of the longest lived among us.

III. A third circumstance, which would obstruct the progress of Unitarianism, is the manifestation of an improper spirit by its friends, and an unworthy manner of conducting their efforts for improving the state of religion in

the world. If they contend for the truth, in the pure love of the truth and of their brethren to whom they are desirous of making it known;—if they use no arguments but those which they themselves believe to be sound;—if they abstain from heats, animosities and personal reflections;—if they never attempt to run an opponent down by clamour, nor overwhelm him by invective, but even in contending against his errors, respect his feelings and his character, and shew still the most friendly disposition towards himself;—and if they never disjoin their love of truth from their concern for practical religion,—they may expect to make some impression upon mankind. And such, I rejoice to know, has been the conduct usually manifested by persons engaged in the defence of Unitarianism. I do not undertake to justify every thing that has been said, done or written on either side of the question; but I think the praise which Archbishop Tillotson conceded to our illustrious forerunners in this great controversy* has been

* "And yet, to do right to the writers on that side, I must own that generally they are a pattern of the fair way of disputing and of debating matters of religion, without heat and unseemly reflections upon their adversaries: in the number of whom I did not expect that the primitive Fathers of the Christian church would have been reckoned by them. They generally argue matters with that temper and gravity, and with that freedom from passion and transport, which becomes a serious and weighty argument. And for the most part, they reason closely and clearly, with extraordinary guard and caution, with great dexterity and decency, and yet with smartness and subtilty enough; with a very gentle heat and few hard words; virtues to be praised wherever they are found, yea even in an enemy, and very worthy our imitation. In a word, they are the strongest managers of a weak cause, and which is ill-founded at the bottom, that perhaps ever yet meddled with controversy: insomuch that some of the Protestants, and the generality of the Popish writers, and even the Jesuits themselves, who pretend to all the reason and subtilty in the world, are in com-

deserved by *many* of those who have espoused the same cause in succeeding times; and that it would not be easy to produce from the stores of theology a series of works on controverted topics, more free from asperity, dogmatism and intolerance of every kind, than those written by Unitarian divines. Long be this our glory and our praise! Far from us be all bitterness, wrath and evil-speaking, all appeals to popular prejudices, all party-spirit, all contentiousness of disposition, all malice and uncharitableness. If these things be in us, the spirit of God cannot be in us, and the work of God cannot prosper in our hands. Let us love the truth and hold to it; but let us do justice to our fellow-men, even when they are most bitterly opposed to our views. Let us sincerely desire their good-will, and neither drop a word nor perform an act calculated to alienate or to offend. At times this may be difficult. It may require us to put a restraint upon our feelings, and repress the risings of indignation, which we may be inclined to view as the promptings of righteous zeal. But where a cause so sacred is at stake, and a duty so solemn is concerned, who would not consent to sacrifice something of his own natural emotions to his sense of propriety and justice towards man, and of conscience towards God?

Let us then guard ourselves and admonish one another, that no root of bitterness spring up among us, destructive to our own spiritual advancement, the peace of society and the good of our cause. If any narrow, uncandid, selfish or sectarian spirit manifest itself, let it be reproved, rebuked, repressed, disowned; and while all of us, both ministers

parison of them but mere *Scolds* and *Bunglers*. Upon the whole matter, they have but this one great defect, that they want a good cause and truth on their side; which if they had, they have reason and wit and temper enough to defend it."—*Sermon* xliv., WORKS, Vol. III. p. 54, 8vo edit.

and people, are united in one bond, striving zealously for the faith of the Gospel, "contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,"—let us shew that we wish to defend and recommend it, only by methods in accordance with its own benignant nature; and we may expect, through God's blessing, to see some good fruit arising from our labours.

I am the more earnest in pressing this consideration on the minds of my Unitarian brethren, as it cannot be denied that there is some risk lest the advocacy of what is necessarily a sectarian form of doctrine, should generate a sectarian spirit and temper. Let us not close our eyes against the existence of this danger. Let us rather look it in the face; let us contend against it; let us overcome it.

If we have no higher aim than to increase the numbers and extend the influence of our own party, our zeal is a mere modification of selfishness, and it will fail as it deserves. If we contend only for abstract ideas about religion, heedless or unmindful of their practical value as the sources of holiness, piety and comfort, we are only endeavouring to substitute one system of speculations for another; and we shall make no impression on the mass. But if we endeavour to spread the influence of sacred truths which we believe to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"—most calculated to win souls to God, best fitted to prepare men for eternal life,—if we endeavour to spread them *because* we believe them to be the most efficacious means of bringing the power of religion home to the hearts of many who are living without God, and who never can and never will be brought near unto God by the Christianity that has been taught them by their spiritual guides;—if we do not confine our view to the mere propagation of opinion, but labour heartily, zealously and earnestly for both these objects,—

viewing them as being in fact and reality conjoined;—or, if they be separated in our minds for distinct contemplation, regarding the promotion of holiness, piety, purity of life, benevolence, love to God and love to man, as of infinitely greater importance than the mere advancement of religious truth even in its purest form;—if we are more anxious to gain converts to Christ than converts to a creed, —and indeed only anxious to convert men to a creed because we regard that as a step in the process of gaining proselytes to Christ, and a step which vastly facilitates the remainder of the work;—if we keep before us in all our efforts, and in all the agencies that we employ, that our ultimate aim is not to train the intellect, but to cultivate, refine and spiritualize the heart,—and if we carefully adopt the means we employ, to the effectuation of this holy object, —we shall then, as it seems to me, contend for the truth, in the holy love of truth,—the pure love of our brethren, —the sincere love and humble imitation of our blessed Saviour,—and the heavenly love of God himself, whom to know and love is life eternal.

On this point I shall only farther add, that we shall be doing gross injustice to our own views, and depriving our exertions of nearly all prospect of usefulness, if we deliver our sentiments on religion simply in a negative form. We should remember that the denial of other men's errors is not the inculcation of Gospel truth;—that oftentimes the most effectual method for doing away with the hold of error upon the hearts of our fellow-men, is the clear and earnest exhibition of the positive truth which lies on the other side;—and that unless the denial of the error is accompanied by the exhibition of the positive truth, we may rob our brother of his faith, the foundation of his hopes, the source of his comforts, the spring of his virtuous energies, the strength of his heart in the day of temptation,

and give him nothing in return. Instead of benefitting him, we may by acting in this manner, do him an irreparable injury. Let us establish truth, as well as demolish error. Let us build up as well as pull down. When we deny all human authority in matters of religion, let us direct the inquiring spirit to the testimony of the Divine Word, recorded in Scripture, consistently and rationally interpreted. While we call upon our brethren to abandon their belief in the Trinity, let us invite them to worship, believe and love, the One God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst we wish them to renounce the unintelligible and unscriptural doctrines of their creeds respecting our Lord Jesus Christ, let us zealously inculcate upon their hearts the reverence due to him as the Son of God, the Saviour of the World, the One Mediator between God and men. While we endeavour to disabuse their minds of the prevalent notions respecting the nature and destiny of man, and the means of a sinner's acceptance with God,—let us constantly present to their minds the blessed doctrine "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto sinners their trespasses,"—and that there remaineth a righteous judgment, in which "God will render unto every man according to his deeds." Without these sacred and glorious doctrines, Unitarianism—nay, Christianity itself—is either a powerless form or an empty name. Without the inculcation of such sacred truths,—their constant exhibition, and continual application to the hearts and lives of men,—the inculcation of Unitarianism cannot prosper. But where these are fairly set forth, scripturally explained, and rationally and earnestly enforced, half the missionary work is done; the foundation of error is sapped, and the fabric is prepared to tumble down by its own weight. I do not mean to say that, in peculiar circumstances and peculiar times, direct contro-

versy,—that is, an open assault upon what are deemed errors, and an exposure of the sophisms by which they are defended,—may not be necessary and justifiable. But this necessity arises but seldom; and even when it comes, if nothing farther is attempted, if nothing positive is imparted, the salt will have "lost its savour, and become good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."

And now, my Unitarian Friends and Christian Brethren, I have placed before you what it lay in my heart to speak to you upon this interesting occasion, for our mutual edification. I disjoin not my own case from yours: I have spoken of dangers which I have felt in my own heart, and suggested cautions of which I have experienced the necessity. These things I throw out for your consideration. So far as they may seem to you useful and profitable, adhere to them, not merely in the conduct of the affairs of the present Association, but on all occasions and in every one of your relations in this life. And if aught hath been said inapplicable, superfluous or erroneous, let it pass you by, as the well-meant though mistaken suggestion of one who "zealously affecteth you, but not well."

The general strain of the remarks which I have now laid before you, will, I trust, sufficiently exempt me from the suspicion of assuming that we, and those who agree with us in religious doctrine, are the sole depositories of divine truth:—or that the views for which we earnestly contend, are destined, in the very form in which we hold them, to prevail universally upon the earth. To suppose either of these points, would be to assume that, instead of collecting a few grains of sand from the shores of the ocean of religious knowledge,—whose depths are unfathomable by the line of our feeble understandings,—we are in possession of

Truth pure and absolute, as she presents herself to the only Infinite and All-perfect Intelligence. It is highly probable that religious truth may be found, in different combinations and proportions, in the creeds of all the churches and denominations into which the Christian world is divided, even in the views of those who professedly have no creed; and that in constituting the pure doctrine which will hereafter overspread the earth, these scattered elements of a sound theology may unite in such a manner as to correct their mutual errors and imperfections, and to cause each one efficiently to contribute to the production of the grand result; as dispersed and various-coloured rays, proceeding from different regions and reflected by different objects, may be received upon one lens, directed to one focus, and there may produce one spot of pure and colourless light. We doubt not that Divine Providence, which causeth all things to work together for good, is employing these conflicting sects and denominations and creeds and churches, as the instruments of effecting a good and wise purpose. Even their errors may be the means of establishing and confirming the truths, towards which these errors unconsciously tend. That our own minds are imbued, and even largely imbued, with errors, misconceptions, prejudices,—misled by imperfect and one-sided views,—it would be unbecoming in us, as weak and fallible mortals, and utterly inconsistent with Christian humility, to deny or doubt. Our liability to error we admit in the broadest terms and with the frankest cordiality. We earnestly desire farther light. We perseveringly inculcate, and we assiduously endeavour to cherish, and we hope we do maintain in some degree, a teachable and candid spirit, prepared to embrace whatever new views may be presented to us, which may appear to be more consonant with truth and more agreeable to the mind of God, than those which we at pre-

sent hold. We recommend and practise freedom of inquiry and earnest search after truth; nor do we refuse any aid which may be afforded us in these investigations, no matter from what quarter it may approach. But there are certain principles which, the longer and the more carefully we examine, we only believe, admire and love the more. We can find nothing better in Nature or in the Gospel than One God, our Father and the Father of All;—One Saviour and Mediator, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified and died for us, yea rather is risen again, that we might live eternally;—and one blissful heaven, open to the virtuous and the holy of every nation, race and name. Until we discover something better than these consolatory doctrines, we cannot but hold to them, believe them, profess them, and desire their growth. If these be errors, they are errors of which we have not been able to discover the fallacy. Relatively to us, therefore, they are truths. At least, we are bound by honour, conscience and duty both to God and man, to act upon our own convictions; and zealously to endeavour to promote, by all just, benevolent and religious methods, the advancement of what we cannot but regard as substantial truth, agreeable to reason, in unison with the Scriptures, adapted to the nature of man, calculated to develop his spiritual faculties, and to advance the honour of God upon this earth, and the advent of his kingdom.

May the Lord give us grace, wisdom and strength to labour earnestly in the field of duty allotted to us! May his work prosper in our land; and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

Charles Green, Printer, Hackney.

MANY FOLDS IN ONE:

OR,

THE PECULIAR ASPECTS OF THE GOSPEL,

WHICH FIND NO REPRESENTATION EXCEPT IN UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY.

A Sermon,

PREACHED IN ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 22ND, 1850;

BEING

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BY

THE REV. J. H. THOM.

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A SERMON.

JOHN X. 16.

"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd."

If Religion ought to unite men, and not to divide and separate, the first question which naturally suggests itself to our Association this day is, How shall we justify our own existence? What is our relation to Christianity; and to its competing representatives? Are we Rivals? Or, are we Reconcilers? Union is the chief want of Christ's Church, as it is the chief fruit of God's Spirit. Disunion is the most marked characteristic of the religious World. The Sects do not love one another. Their distinctions are not the differences which the same Spirit worketh, and which, when they blend with and mellow one another, furnish out Perfection, but conflicting and mutually exclusive. He that is saved by Sacraments, and he that is saved by Creeds, are reciprocally enemies of that which each regards as vital. Under the same nominal banner, implacable foes turn their arms on one another. Sin and ignorance go unassailed, and Hell triumphs, while the armies of Heaven wage their internecine war.—In the midst of

this angry discord, what is our Position? Are we but *one* of the tongues of this religious Babel, insisting that our own dialect is the universal language of Christianity, the very idiom of Heaven? Are we but one among the Sects, waiting till all mankind shall be constrained to accept our speculative views; offering to the Churches no healing Principle that underlies all differences, but standing proudly on our own ground, with the claim that towards *us* the world must move, around *us* as a centre the world must gather? Do we hold to Christianity only the relation which one of the systems of Ancient Philosophy held to the Universe,—arrogating the possession of a truer Theory than any other of the competing Schools? Is our notional Theology the mightiest power of our Religion, and the girdle of our Christian Brotherhood? It may be that we have a truer Theology. We at least believe so. But still if we built our Church upon that individual belief of ours, and not upon the universal Rock, which each Christian soul supplies, of a spiritual recognition of Christ as the Image of our Father, the common Aim and Aspiration of us all, I do not see how we should differ fundamentally from the other Churches of which we complain that they introduce false centres of Association—false as centres even if they were true as Doctrines—that they seek not a practical Unity, but a notional Uniformity. Do we then agree with them that Christianity is an Orthodoxy; and is our only difference as to *what* the Orthodoxy is?—This is not our Position: and that it is not, is evident from this fact, that we never doubt that God and Christ can touch by some living powers the souls of those, all whose religious Theories appear to us conspicuously false,—that we could not entertain the

thought of cutting off from the Christian Body those who, in their intellectual conceptions of Christianity, have scarcely one view in common with us, without hearing the solemn warning of the Master reproachfully sounding through our hearts, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of."—And if this be so, then our practical sympathies establish, that our Christian fellowship does not stand on the narrow basis of intellectual agreement, that our Church is wider than our Creed, that it is as wide as our Faith, and includes all those whom any spiritual Trust, any discipleship of their Affections, any recognition of their Souls, draws to vital union with God and Christ. Who would maintain that *moral* union was impossible between two good men, whose *Philosophy* of morals was wide as the poles asunder? And why should Christian union be impossible between those who agree in love, and acknowledge the actual attraction of the Son of God, but differ in the Theory?

I think it is impossible for any one to rise to a moment's true fellowship with God and Christ without the desire and prayer issuing from his soul, that he may never represent to others any mere individuality of his own as a condition of that union,—that he may never interpose anything of his own as a screen between men and the light of the glory of God shining in the face of Christ. Who has not felt the fear, that our religious Institutions, our Churches, and our Preachings, necessarily harden into permanent obstructions and fixed points, classes and conceptions which would have proved transient and progressive if not thus arrested and organized,—that we are giving outward form and subsistence to separating Symbols which ought to show nothing but one stage of our growth,—that we make

it difficult to grow at all when, though not formally pledged to past states, we are yet practically hemmed in by their monuments and expressions,—and that the Spirit of God would long since have brought the Christian world to a substantial harmony if no religious organizations and no professional Ministers of Religion had ever been established! I do not say that that is a fear to be yielded to in an unmodified form—but this I would say, that the man on whom it does not rest is sure to be a most unfit exponent of Christianity as an instrument and energy of God for drawing the souls of all his children into union with Himself.—But we must not for a moment imagine that unqualified positions will afford us Truth and fulness; and we must not for a moment forget that every noble mind exists under a necessity of finding an entire harmony of being. No man can have his Intellect and his Religion disunited without infinite degradation to each, without imbecility or slavery to himself. If our Religion is not both Spirit and Truth, the fuel of our whole nature in a mighty fire, it is simply a falsehood and a contradiction,—no Master Principle as yet reconciles and rules us, and our Faculties, like the horses in Plato's Chariot of the Soul, draw different ways. A harmony between his Reason and his Faith, between his Affections and his Convictions, between the law of his Thought and the objects and devotions of his Soul, every man is bound to maintain under penalty of spiritual decay. Indifference to speculative Truth is the perversion and gross caricature of liberality, into which men of light minds are apt to fall. Because we would be free from all Dogmatism, and from that spirit of Orthodoxy which attaches fatal consequences to intellectual perceptions, are we therefore

to hold it of no importance to the growth and to the integrity of our souls, whether we see through another man's mind, or through our own? To build our Church on speculative opinions is the presumption of Antichrist: to be indifferent to what we see and feel to be Truth betrays a levity of Nature, into whose looseness no deep enthusiasm of a spiritual order can ever strike its roots. We cannot safely trifle with simplicity, and tear asunder our spiritual being. There is one kind of Truth without which we perish, steadfast allegiance to our own perceptions so long as they are our perceptions, an organic unity between the various parts of our nature, between the light that is in us and the life that comes out of us. Our moral growth proceeds out of our Truthfulness, out of an honest Mind, as a Plant out of the soil from which its roots draw life,—and to seek nourishment for our Religion apart from our own Reason, is like tearing a tree from its natural feeders, in the vain hope to keep it alive by dipping it here and there in the moisture of vases.—I believe it to be quite true that our Christianity may exist without fatal injury in connection with any of the views of Christian Theology that are honestly *our own* views,—and yet to be quite false that we can nourish our spiritual affections even for a day if we cut off their reverent and steadfast alliance with our own Intellect, or ask carelessly with light-minded Pilate, What is Truth?—We must maintain our spiritual fellowship with all who are drawn towards God, by Christ as His image, in combination with absolute reverence for individual conviction, and with an acknowledgment of the necessity of having our Religion the full Truth, Reality, and Direction of all our being,—the holy flame in which consenting Nature culminates.

We do not stand then as a Sect among the Sects with an offer, like their own, of a truer Theology as the only Christian medium through which God will act upon men's souls. We stand among the Sects with a spirit that would embrace them all: we ask them to cleave to spiritual Realities of trust, life, aspiration, and affection—and, not indeed to abandon Theory, for that is impossible, but to keep their Theories mainly for their own satisfaction, for such reconciliation of their whole nature, of *their* Faith and their Reason, as to themselves they may be able to afford. At the same time we have a Christian Theology, as all thinking men must have, for a divine law constrains us to seek inward unity: and moreover, Christian faithfulness compels us to offer this Theology to the world, not as essential to individual Salvation, but as the only basis on which Christ's Prospect of a Universal Church can ever be fulfilled,—as the only Theory of Christianity that saves Christians from the necessity of excommunicating others who claim to be as earnest Christians as themselves. We indeed, through our sympathy with their Christian life and affections, can embrace those whose Theory it is that they are saved only by Creed, or only by Sacrament, but they cannot embrace us; by their first principles they are compelled to be Schismatics, and so we offer our Theology to the warring sects in order that indispensable conditions for the fulfilment of Christ's delightful vision of Spiritual Union may come into existence, of one Fold and one Shepherd for us all.—I shall now present our leading views of Christianity; and it would not be inconsistent with anything I have said if I was to call them, The peculiar Aspects of Revelation which find no representation except in Unitarian Christianity.

Christianity in our view is simply a scheme of intense Realism. It is all in the person of Christ: and all Gospels and Books are precious only as they enable us to look upon and listen to the living Revelation, the Word made Flesh. It is God in Christ. It is Man in Christ. It is Immortality and our celestial Life in Christ, who returned to earth with the affections that had made it heavenly, and startled Mary into recognition by the dear tone of his Voice. And it is Universal Brotherhood in Christ, for all who are one with him are one with one another, as the branches of one Vine.

1. To give *personality* to God was the first end of his mission. No man before, and no Trinitarian now, ever conceived how all the moral qualities of Deity, all sanctity and all grace, all the goodness of Love and all the severity of Holiness, could flow out of the same spirit, and, without limiting or impeding one another, dwell together in the living unity of *one person*. We gain little by God ceasing to be an abstraction of Law or Power, if Revelation does not enable us to give conceivable Personality to his moral qualities. Now this is just what the ordinary Theology forbids us to do. It gives us no one Person who is perfect. It *distributes* spiritual perfections, divides the Godhead, and impersonates the contrasted Attributes in different Beings. And in so doing it has abandoned as impracticable the great Problem of all true Religion, spiritual Fulness and Perfection manifested in the indivisible personality of one Character. It has a God all composed of unapproachable Holiness, unable of Himself to come into any remedial or benignant relations with human sinfulness, or even with human penitence; and a God all composed of forgiving Mercy, who can by the emphasis of his own acts alter the rela-

tions of Humanity towards the Holiness of the former, who, within his *personal* being, has no resources to make Pardon possible; and a God all composed of spiritual Energy, who, not enshrined in his own essence, can now come forth in living operation upon the souls of those whom the redeeming God has brought within the conditions of Forgiveness:—three Persons in one God, but no one Person within whose single Being the attributes are harmonized, in whose single character, active Love, Holiness, and the spiritual Energy that communicates Life, unite and blend together in every feeling and manifestation, and cannot even in thought be separated without injuring the full perfection of God.—This is the worst aspect of the tri-personal Theology. So far it ceases to be a Religion for Man; for it solves the great spiritual difficulty, as far as it solves it at all,—only by means which human nature does not supply. How can men be expected to reconcile in their single selves those contrasted qualities, Love, Holiness, and Energy, the several aspects of goodness, the compassion of the Heart and the austerity of the Soul, which God himself could not reduce into active harmony without the resource of three persons in His nature?—And thus not only is the Image of all perfections dwelling in our mind taken away, but one of the most imperfect of our human tendencies is directly encouraged, the unchastened delight we take in prominent features of character, in striking manifestations of unmodified attributes.

And how ill, really, does the character of Christ conform to the exigencies of such a system! He surely is the full Image of *all* that is moral in God, and not the impersonation of any one phase or quality of goodness. It is impossible to describe any one aspect of him without

mixing all our spiritual colours. We cannot picture him in a single attitude without uniting in the effort all the spiritual emotions and faculties we have. Would we characterize him by Love? Then let us not forget the awful sanctity in which that love was rooted. We surely can discern no unmodified affectionateness of nature in those unsparing repetitions of "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," or in those terrible invectives cast in men's faces, "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the condemnation of God?"—Would we make Meekness and Gentleness his distinction? Then let us not forget that great Presence before which Priests gave way in their pride of place, and common men sent out to injure him fell down in reverence, and Pilate, struck with conviction to the soul, but fast held in the toils of his own guilt, sought in vain to wash the innocent blood from his hands.—Would we define him by his consciousness of peculiar relations to God? Then forget not his as peculiar relations to humanity. Speak not of the Desert and the Mount of Prayer,—and forget the boat, the cottage, and the garden, the corn fields and the shore of the Lake. Quote not the passage, "I am not alone, for my Father is with me," and omit the passage, "Tarry ye here and watch with me, for my soul is exceeding sorrowful—watch with me for this hour."—Shall we name him Prince of Peace? Then forget not that *there are interests* for the sake of which he held that all social variance must be risked. "I am not come to send Peace on Earth, but a Sword"—and, "Whosoever loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me."—And this it is which makes the difficulty of conceiving aright of the greatness of Christ, or attempting any description of

his character. It is as a beam of the solar light. All the *vivid* colours do not separately appear, unless you artificially divide the ray: when they are united nothing is seen but the white radiance. All the brilliant hues have to combine in order to furnish that colourless purity,—but in it they do not appear. And so, often, we have strong sympathy with single moral qualities, but when they blend together they seem to disappear. We are struck by the melodies, but lose them in the harmonies. A striking character we comprehend: a perfect character becomes indistinct. In the fulness of all its parts, there is no part prominent. Now it is this completeness as the Image of God which commends Christ to our long and reverent study; and makes him the Religion of mankind. He neither strives nor cries. In his tempered Power there is no struggling Impulse: and out of his mellow nature, chastened by its own richness, for all the angel host are present and all in sympathy, no solitary emotion breaks wildly loose in liberated passion.

Apart, then, from Unitarian Christianity, we have no one person who is a full Image of all the moral qualities of the spiritual God. Apart from Unitarian Christianity God is still, in relation to us, impersonal, morally inconceivable, irreducible to unity. His harmony of character is obtained by a method to which nothing in our human experience corresponds or can correspond—for which our nature does not furnish us with the tri-personal resources. Will it be said that in the Trinitarian Theology, the human nature of Jesus does represent the full Image of God? Then, to say nothing of the destructive mixture of personalities, this is to make the *man* Jesus a fuller type of Deity, than the God Christ. And better to our thought, we speak it with reverence, better

to have a Nature that is the Image of the whole Godhead, than to *be* only a *part* of it!

2. And as Christ is the Son of God, inasmuch as in just proportions, on the scale of Humanity, he is the full moral Image of his Father's mind; so is he the Son of Man, inasmuch as he is, in his own person, the highest earthly Result and Expression of Human Nature. Whatever new powers Humanity may unfold hereafter, whatever may be the degree and form of Christ's glory *now*, he, as we know him in his Gospel, is the Consummation of things on Earth; the completion of God's purposes here; the most perfect form into which our nature's elements can be moulded so long as the influences of the better country, even the heavenly, come to us on this side the grave. "The Son knoweth the Father, and whatsoever he seeth the Father do, these things doeth the Son likewise." The right Religion for all mankind is evidently in the right relations of one individual man towards God. That Man is the Religion of the world. Christ is the Revelation of human Perfection, and the gospels are its precious Record. The Revelation is not a Book but a Life. The Christ revealed God's will by doing it, as he brought Life and Immortality into the very midst of our earthly being by rising from the Grave and passing into the Heavens with his human heart unchanged. Say that the world was in ignorance of what God aimed at by all the conditions of this existence in the midst of which Man is stationed. Jesus stands in these conditions. Within their scope and pressure he leads a divine life.—Here is a Universe of mixed agencies—pervaded by an invisible and silent God; ages upon ages it rolls on, producing abortive forms of good —the Womb and the Tomb of ever fresh imperfections;

—Here is Man, aspiring, suffering, struggling towards the light,—raised above the outward life, that else might content him, by a far-reaching soul, harassed by great Thoughts, and unquietly falling into the arms of Death, —can any Revelation be conceived so real, so true, so needed, so definite, as *the very Being* whom our heavenly Father by such culture is seeking in each of us to produce?—This is to explain the mysteries of Providence, by actually showing how they contribute to make the moral harmonies of an understanding spirit, and what is the form of character to which they tend. This is living Truth from God. If this is not a Revelation, and a practical Revelation, will any one tell us what a Revelation ought to be?

You understand what God means by any moral circumstances when you see another, placed in those circumstances, filling them with the divine light of his Goodness, with the glory of his lowliness and his greatness. Such is Christianity. A partaker of our nature, tempted in all things even as we are, selected by God to show to all His children what a Son of his should be, yet not exempted from the necessity of personal faithfulness and effort and the endeavours of a holy Will, who obtains strength through prayer, and the sight of his Father's face in the hour and power of darkness through agonies of supplication, exhibits a filial mind under every attitude of external circumstance. You see him stand successively in every place of difficulty, and as he robes himself in a living glory derived from the conditions he is passing through, you behold in him its intended issue, how full of wise and beautiful Fitness, of Holiness, and of infinite tenderness, is the moral Providence of God. For, the solution of the Problem of our Life

is not to be found in any System of Doctrines, nor in any abstract views of religious Truth. It is a practical question, and practically must it be answered. And Christ meets the case. He will aid you to be Sons of God, if that great thought has risen upon you,—or quicken you with it if you will suffer his light to shine into your souls,—to find your Father wherever you can perfect your spirit, or establish a tie of brotherhood with any of His children. It is human Nature desiring its Perfection that alone is qualified to understand Jesus—to derive aids from him—to receive the Religion that breathes from his Life. And no form of Doctrines, however true, will faithfully convey this power of Christianity. In him was Life, and the *Life* was the light of Men. Words, even *his* words, are not the adequate expressions of spiritual Things. Actions, frames of character, manifested affections, living forms of Love and Self Denial, are their only representatives in kind. Who could picture out Christ from his precepts, invaluable as they are? If we had to read them, unclothed except by words, we should soon find what it was to put our own feeble, doubtful and disputed meanings upon them; what it was to interpret them by our poor suggestions of Love and Duty. To have them translated into Life by Christ is to put not ours but his meanings upon them, and to perceive the fulness they suggested to *him*.

And thus have we for our Christianity not abstract Doctrines but spiritual Persons and Things—our God in his Image; and human perfection in a Man: not shadows for the Intellect but apprehensible realities for the Soul: not Ideas for the Mind to entertain, but Persons with whom we are to enter personally into living rela-

tions. Surely it was in this way that God conceived his Revelation. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Surely it was in this way that Christ claimed to be the Religion of the World. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "If the Son (the relation of Son-ship) shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Surely it was in this way that Paul understood the Salvation of the Gospel. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,"—and "we beholding in that glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same Image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

I shall not be supposed to deny that this Revelation has a certain possible expression under the form of Doctrines: what I mean is, that the whole of its peculiar power as a Religion consists in giving us God and Christ as real Persons, with whom our Souls hold personal relations. And apart from Unitarian Christianity we have no one Person in whom Man's duty and immortal Destiny are embodied. Trinitarianism makes Jesus Christ *two* persons: his perfection ceases to be the conceivable perfection of human Nature; and, without destruction to its own system, his death and sufferings cannot be the death and sufferings of a Man. On its view he ceases to be the human Model, the image of our Father, and becomes in part the very substance of God.

3. And is it not a forgetfulness that Christianity is an intense Realism, which must account for that strangest of all anomalies, that a Revelation, which ought to be an open exhibition of divine Truth, in the hands of its many Interpreters, is made the most dark and perplexed, the

most vexed and agitated, of all subjects of controversy? In the personal relation of each man to Christ as the perfection of his nature, and through Christ to God, alone can be found any centre of Unity for the whole Christian World. All other ground of Union shifts with the flying shadows of Thought. Intellectual agreement is impossible. Into no one fold whose fences are Articles can we all be gathered. Even those who tell us of the beauty and safety of such a fold, and would compel us to come in, are disputing among themselves as to what, and where, the defining boundaries are. But may we not all be one in cleaving to that Father of which our Saviour is the human Image,—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ? Listen to Christ's means of Unity: "The glory Thou hast given me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are." And what glory did God confer on Christ, that through him all men might share in it? Was it not the sense of Sonship? that we should all come consciously to draw our spiritual Life direct from God, as our Father, and our Limit? We are to be loving students of Christ's inspiration, that each of us, according to the measure of the gift of God, may himself be a sharer in it. The Lord becomes our Mediator, the conductor of God's Spirit to us, when that principle in our Nature which is capable of divine impressions is thrilled and exalted by the fulness of its Life in him. Then has each of us a privilege to say, "Flesh and Blood have not revealed it unto us, but the Spirit of our Father." Attraction to Himself through the likeness of his Christ is what Paul calls the Energy of God for the Salvation of Men. He judges each of us by the contrast of his Faith and Obedience with our poor shrinkings and timidities. It is the call of Action and Reality to unused

capabilities: and no Soul can know him and deny the justice of the appointment, that to him all Judgment is committed, on the express grounds that he is the Son of Man, for Judgment over men naturally belongs to him who, being a Man, condemned Sin in the Flesh, and worked out the inspirations of God within him. He is our Mediator to show us the Father, to show us the Righteousness of God that springs from filial Faith—to show us the issues to which our Father's promptings tend—to draw us into the presence of the Infinite that our souls may feel the eternal Spirit, with none between. But surely he would be no Mediator, if he arrested us with himself, and did not lead us upwards to the Source of his own life and ours. Sons of God, we must have personal Communion with our Father, else we are exiles from his immediate presence, and know Him only by the hearing of the ear. This would be the very antithesis of Christianity—even to undo the work of our Lord,—to banish God from the Soul,—and substitute an Image. Let us once again hear the Principle of our Christian fellowship from the lips of Christ: "I pray that they all may be one as we are; as Thou, father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one, even as we are."—And here again must I not reluctantly add that, apart from Unitarian Christianity, this personal relation of each soul to Christ as the Image of our Father, and the mightiest Conductor of His Spirit, is nowhere represented as the universal and sufficient element of Christian Unity, the one life blood that flows through us all?—Even with this Principle of Union, universally recognized as alone central and essential, our separate religious associations might still exist,—determined by the affinities of our minor and circumstantial agreement,—but such Diversity

would break no Unity, for in all the Worship would be in the same Spirit, and the Action towards the same end,—even to bring the whole World to God through its participation of the Mind of Christ.

4. And this strong Christian Realism, which would break down all shadowy, speculative barriers, and make one Fold out of many, will alone be found powerful enough to draw into Christ's Fold those who are now without. For the Infidelity that prevails is mainly owing to that notional Theology which presents no *reality* to the Toiling, and is fast losing its traditional hold upon the Thinking. If men substitute the definite Truth that may be contained in propositions for the inexhaustible wells of Living Water that are contained in Christ, there must necessarily be an exhaustion of Faith the moment any discordances appear between the bounden Letter of the Creed and the claims of Reason, or the range and demands of the spiritual Affections. The letter killeth: the spirit giveth life. Now, says St. Paul, the Lord is that spirit. Realities, living persons, and objective Things, not words or notions, are its vehicles, and so the Universe and Christ are the only symbols and expressions of God that cannot be exhausted. Religion, unless it is to become a corrupter of men's souls, must be far above the mind it sways. If not filled, tasked, inspired, and awed by the objects of our Faith, we have faith no more, but either an open infidelity, a thin veiled scorn, or, worse than all, a prudent conformity that puts God and the World upon the same level, that makes Religion only one phase of a man's earthly life, and his Sunday's worship an extension and aggravation of the other six,—the foulest Mammon Worship of them all. For in the case of those with whom Doctrines

and Practices are secretly disbelieved but ostensibly accepted, Religion is far worse than an Error, it has become a Lie, the most worldly of all worldly Poisons,—for where is there any restorative Power for those who use God in the service of the World, who silence the divine oracles in their souls by vulgar conformity and pretence? If the Salt has lost *its saltness*,—if it too is but a mass of worldliness, wherewith shall *it* be salted? It is not Error we would condemn or judge, but a religion that has ceased to be a Religion, and is now only the falsest part of a man's worldly life.—There are in the midst of us two orders of diffused Infidelity;—the one in the Toiling class, from the utter spiritual ignorance that accompanies Physical debasement, the extinction of the higher instincts when multitudes live apart from the moral experiences of Goodness, Beauty, Purity, Order, Love, fair and blessed Life, which make the grounds of positive knowledge from which Faith ascends to God and feels the stirrings of immortal affections and desires:—the other—the Unbelief that arises in all classes when Reason and Aspiration outgrow the notions of professional Divines,—or when a sharpened worldly Intelligence gets out of sympathy with a Religion that never was of individual origin nor had an individual growth, and gradual divergence of the inner Thought from the outer worship and profession makes a long continuance in spiritual feebleness and dishonesty. It never happens in other Departments that when men discover their notions to be weak and wrong, they pass through a stage of contempt and infidelity before they take up with juster views. It is the natural growth of these better views that at once discloses and removes the errors. It is far otherwise in Religion. Men do not

discover their imperfections here by any legitimate process. They discover them only when enlightened from other quarters, they suddenly begin to nauseate what does not harmonize with the general tone and healthiness of their minds; and so errors are displaced, not by positive religious Truths, but because to an improved general Intelligence they have become painfully repellent and distasteful. Why else have we that most melancholy, but most instructive exhibition, so often repeated in these days, of clergymen of the Church of England passing at one bound from the complicated creed and ritual of the Establishment to total Infidelity,—suddenly discovering that they can no longer preach its doctrinal Articles or administer its sacerdotal forms, and then setting themselves to write down Christianity itself, avenging themselves in natural reaction upon that Power, in whose name and under whose yoke, their Conscience and their Self-Respect had suffered such grievous wounds?—If Religion was treated with the same reverential Freedom as any other vast human Interest, to which the mind must grow, these transition periods of Unbelief need never exist at all. I call Freedom reverential, for the true presumption is when a man approaches God and Christ with no fresh inquiry, as though he had exhausted the theme. If there had been no attempt to define the absolute Truth, and no curse issued against the natural laws of growth,—if the Prophets had not been killed in Palestine,—if Socrates had not been poisoned in Greece,—(for this evil is no peculiar product of Christianity),—if Wycliffe and all his successors had not been persecuted in England, Periods of active Infidelity, and it may be even monster blotches of spiritual ignorance and debasement, need never have arisen,

and Religion might have grown by natural development as quietly, with as little of daily rupture or too rapid disturbance, as when the child imperceptibly passes into the man. How is it possible for Unbelief not to be generated in this country when the Teaching of the prevalent Religion is not ruled by Truth and Growth, but by precedent, and when to the practically exercised mind of the toiling man thirsting for Reality for the support and nourishment of his soul in a world where his spiritual enemies are all too real, she has nothing to offer but on the one side mystical metaphysics, on the other sacerdotal pretences, with an unsettled controversy between the two, as to which of them possesses the divine magic against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail?

We surely have a Christianity to stay such Infidelity,—a Christianity which cannot come into conflict with Reason or Growth, nor disgust and mock the strong natures who are seeking real supports, for it offers no shadows of speculation, and no priestly charms, but the personal God and the living Christ, and asks for filial Trust and practical conformity—a Christianity which is the development and perfection of man's spiritual tendencies, which aims at educating, not at *altering* as if in itself incurably bad, the nature which God has given us, which comes to fulfil the Law that is in our Nature, and the Prophets that are in our souls.

What then do *we* more than others? How do we apply ourselves to this our Mission? Have we made clear to the world our great fundamental idea of Christ's Church? Have we made it impossible to confuse us with the Sects, as if we, like them, were seeking intellectual agreement with ourselves as the only Remedy for the broken peace of the religious World? Have we

penetrated the Sects with the knowledge that the only view we would have them to abandon, as essentially anti-Christian, is, that men cannot enter into union with God except through the same Creeds,—and that the only view we care for their adopting, as essentially Christian, in whose train all Truth would be free to follow, is that God can draw the hearts of all men to Himself by the attraction of His image in our own nature;—that through the fellowship of love and aspiration with his holy child Jesus, the first-born of many brethren, we all can come unto our Father?—Men know that which we deny. Have we rendered it impossible for them to be ignorant of that which we affirm? The world knows that we deny the Trinity. Does it know the Father we adore, and the Church we contemplate? Above all, is it compelled to acknowledge that God must be with us of a truth, for that none could do the works that we do unless our Father fed our hearts with His grace?

Have we not relied too much upon the Truth and Reasonableness of our opinions, and too little upon spiritual Power, upon personal Enthusiasm? The Religion that moves men's souls is not contained in expositions of Truth—if Truth means exactness of statement and correctness of Thought—but in that Truth embodied and obeyed which is spiritual Reality, life, and impersonation. We have reclined our Faith upon the maxim, that Truth is mighty and will prevail. Yes, but what Truth? It is not the Truth of Logic, of theory, or of argument that gains religious sway over men's souls,—but the Truth of Life, which shows its spirit in its works, and comes in outward forms of Love and Self Denial, with the Beauty of Holiness upon it,—such truth as Christ had in his mind when he said, "*I* am the

Truth." Our want of great success upon the popular mind is a fact that we must account for in some way. No doubt many causes enter into the true explanation—and not a few over which we could have had no control; but have not the circumstances of our History, perhaps without any fault of ours, contributed to the suppression in us of spiritual fervour, and mighty deeds of Faith? Alas! we never have been free to follow our own impulses, and pursue our own Life. We have lived in conflict with errors, and when the world has seen our face it has been when turned in protest upon their darkness, a darkness which *they* did not feel, rather than when transfigured by the glory of our own Love and Trust. The mighty power of Religion is concerned with men's affections and aspirations, with that part of our nature which reaches to the something infinite, and commands the Faith of the world not by correct reasonings but by personal appeals, by the beauty of her living presence, by the sweetness of her living voice, by the Prophet words and Martyr deeds which show that the Spirit of the Lord is upon her because he hath anointed her to preach the Gospel to the Poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to release the captives of sin, to draw Songs of Praise and Joy from the Mourner's heaviness, and to do things divine as her natural work. No religious Cause can ever mightily prosper, until by the power and loveliness of its fruits it awakens men to some spiritual Beauty and Good which their own faith and worship will not supply. Have we not turned our very strength into weakness, and in our character of earnest and devout inquirers, strong in the faith that God and his Truth were with us, too serenely awaited the result, forgetting that it is only the light of Life, the light that warms, God makes vic-

torious?—I blame not the holy men who have gone before us, our fathers in this faith,—the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. They fulfilled their Mission, and Wisdom is justified of all her children. Nay, I blame not ourselves, for I believe that we are what we are honestly, and it may be that God has not called any of us to higher work. But I should, indeed, despair, if we did not look and pray for something better,—if we did not live on the belief that God's mightiest agents are yet in reserve,—not in the cogency of convincing arguments, but in the incalculable power of that influence which streams from the souls of devoted men. When the fulness of time is come, He will send forth the spirits which the times require. When the word can be spoken with effect, the needed servants of the Most High will appear to speak it. Even now one often thinks, such is the confusion of our religious Things, so manifestly are the old systems exposing their rottenness and hastening to their ruin, that a word spoken with power ought to shake them down, that any clear utterance of spiritual Truth forcible enough to make the Nation hear it, would render impossible any longer continuance of the unreal Religion which has so strongly on it Paul's mark of carnality,—that it makes divisions and strife. But the time is not ripe.—We, at least, do not seem elected to that service. I blame us not that God has not called us to this mission. I blame us not that our Truth has not so burned with the fire of Life, as to consume all the wood, hay, and stubble. I rather thank God that we have simulated nothing; that in circumstances of peculiar temptation to forsake our simplicity, our outward expression has ever been rather *under* than above our actual temperature. We have

borne patiently the reproach of coldness, rather than assume heat. In an age of feverish excitement and exaggeration, in the midst of coarse vehemence, of sensuous appeals, and theatric eloquence, we have refused to go beyond the words of truth and soberness that were natural to us. They may have been weak and poor: they were at least real. We have been called dead and lifeless: I claim for us the distinction of being at least simple and sincere. Let us abide by that holy reality. Let us not use so much as a tone of our voice, an emphasis on a word, beyond the truth of our feeling. And these perhaps are the directions and preparations of soul that God will not disdain to fill with His Spirit when next he sees fit to send some great gifts of his Power to men. But God forbid that we should be satisfied with what we are! that our exhibitions of the Christian Life, our utterances of Christ's Truth, should seem to ourselves enough for the conversion of the world! God forbid that we should even be surprised at our own want of success!—We cannot indeed *make ourselves* mighty Prophets and servants of the Most High; we cannot even adopt that personal fervour which confers spiritual power unless it is *given* us from above,—but we can know our need and our place, and we can pray for that which we have not, even the inspiration of the Almighty;—we can discern, if we are humble and look upwards, the kind of men that must come, to speak and to live,—and we can by faithfulness, according to the measure of our gifts, prepare, in the due time, for the rising up from amongst us of some, nurtured in holiness and simplicity, upon whom the Spirit that bloweth where it listeth may list to blow.—Let us despise or discard nothing that we have hitherto valued, Learning, Know-

ledge, just thoughts, clear understandings and sound minds—but let us value them chiefly as preparations for the pure reception and transmission of God's spirit, so that it may find in us nothing to corrupt or neutralize, to impede or turn aside its light.—And let us not despair, nor be impatient at God's slowness. He is watching the times and the seasons, and when Christianity is once again worthily represented in living men, there will be found multitudes and multitudes of souls, now perhaps living out of all visible communion with all visible churches who will start at their word;—multitudes on multitudes with whom all those powers and obstacles which we deem so repressive of our just influence, Prejudice, Habit, Fashion, Orthodoxy, Priesthoods, have not a breath of influence,—who will render themselves up in loving discipleship to any one who will send life into their spiritual nature, to any who will awaken their souls, to any who will fill them with serene sentiments to take away their weary degradation and ennoble their being—to any who will show them their God.

We sometimes hear, but only from the critics of Religion, that Christianity is failing in these our days, and is not equal to the World's Salvation. Have any of its servants told us so,—the workers and martyrs of any age? "I saw Satan like lightning fall from Heaven," said the greatest of the Workers of God. And this will be a universal experience. No man who struggles with God's enemies is troubled by any belief of their eternity. —Let us hold fast by Realities, and in his own time God will supply the agents that his Kingdom needs. It may not be ours to raise that Tree of Life beneath whose

wide shade all people shall rest, but our very faith in the fulfilment of Christ's Vision of his Church compels us to believe, that to us largely has been committed the holy privilege of preserving and nourishing its seed.

THE END.

RICHARD KINDER, PRINTER, GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

ONE GOD THE FATHER,

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES.

A DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN

LITTLE PORTLAND STREET CHAPEL, JUNE 2ND, 1852,

BEFORE THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

AND AGAIN

AT SWANSEA, JULY 21ST,

BEFORE

THE WESTERN UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

BY THOMAS MADGE,

MINISTER OF ESSEX STREET CHAPEL.

LONDON:

EDWARD T. WHITFIELD, 178, STRAND.

1852.

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A SERMON.

My Christian Brethren,

It is my purpose, in the present discourse, to show that the language of Scripture and the facts there recorded,—the plain, undisputed and indisputable facts there recorded,—are utterly inconsistent with the commonly-received notions of the Deity of Christ, and that they form the best, the strongest, the surest ground on which to rest the doctrine, as we hold it, of the unity of God. I am well aware that upon this subject little that is positively new can be advanced; and it may seem, therefore, to some persons, an idle employment of our time to be retracing arguments with which most of us may be presumed to be perfectly familiar. Such, however, is the spirit of the times, that the necessity is imposed upon us, if we would be found faithful, of stating again and again the doctrines which we really hold and the evidence by which they are supported. So often are we denounced as enemies of the faith once delivered to the saints, that it becomes us to be prepared with the means of repelling the accusation, and of showing that we stand upon the foundation of prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. For our own sakes, too, and to be better able to give a reason for the views which we entertain, to those who ask it of

us in the spirit of kind inquiry, it is needful that we sometimes review the proofs by which they are established, and so impress them upon our minds that they may readily recur to us whenever the time and the occasion may require it of us. And let it not be forgotten that such occasions are now continually arising. On this account, familiar as we think we may be with the grounds and reasons of our faith, we shall not do amiss to become more familiar with them still. Of this I am persuaded, that the more intimately acquainted with them we are, the more we shall feel that they have not only the sanction of reason, but the authority of Scripture,—that they not only harmonize with the teachings of nature, but more and above all with the truth as it is in Jesus. The words from which I shall now address you are contained in

1 Corinthians viii. 6.

"*To us there is but one God, the Father.*"

Such is the language of the Apostle Paul,—and I mean to show that this language is to be taken in its strict, plain, literal signification. I mean to show that the doctrine of the Scriptures, and especially of the Scriptures of the New Testament, is, that God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is one—one as we commonly understand it — and that no other being can claim equality with him, or be entitled to that supreme religious homage which is due exclusively to the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the blessed and only Potentate whom no man hath seen or can see.

In establishing this position I shall first appeal to the general current language of Scripture, and then to certain facts which that Scripture has revealed to us.

Of the language of Scripture what shall I say? I

there any question that, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Revelation, the constant, invariable tenour of it is that God is one,—one underived, independent, undivided being? So numerous are the passages expressing this truth in plain, unambiguous terms, that far more than the time allotted for this discourse would be altogether insufficient for the barest reference to them. Putting aside all that is said, and so often and emphatically said, on this subject in the Old Testament, what do we meet with in the New Testament? What said Christ? What said his apostles? I might go on quoting text after text till your very patience was exhausted, in which the Father is declared to be the only God, the only true God, the only wise God, and where Jesus Christ is said to have derived all his power and authority from the Father; but for this there is no necessity. No one does or can deny it. No one who is even slightly acquainted with the contents of the New Testament can be ignorant of the solemn and repeated declarations there to be found, that there is but one God, the Father, who is above all and through all and in all. It speaks in every chapter. It breathes in almost every verse. It requires not the aid of elaborate argument to prove that it is so. It lies open to the view of every one, if he will but open his eyes to see it. Notwithstanding all this, however, it is alleged by the so-called orthodox that the same Scriptures which teach the sole Godhead of the Father, teach also the Godhead of the Son. Here then, apparently at least, are two contradictory propositions. If the Father be God, and the only God, how can the Son be God also? There are not two Gods. That is admitted by all. What then is the meaning of the proposition that Christ is God as well as the Father? To say that there is but one God,

and then to add that the Father is God and the Son is God, is, taking the words in their plain signification, as much a contradiction as can be put into language. Now to this seeming contradiction what is the explanation given? Since, confessedly, there cannot be two Gods. how, I might say to an orthodox brother, how do you explain the phenomenon that Jesus is God as well as the Father without violating the principle of the Divine Unity? You must have some way of doing this—what is that way? He replies, it is this: In the divine nature there are three persons or distinctions, denominated respectively the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and these together form one God. Or, to speak in more general terms, Christ is God by virtue of the union of the Godhead with the manhood. By adopting this view of the union of God and Christ, we are furnished, he says, with a key which unlocks and lays open to us the meaning of those passages which seem, at first sight, to imply the inferiority of the Son to the Father. The divine and human natures were so united together as to form the one person of Christ, and hence he was at the same time both God and man.

Of the doctrine here expressed I have no hesitation in saying that it is one which comes under the category of impossibilities. If I can be certain of anything appertaining to the divine nature, it is that such a theory must necessarily be false. For what is meant by the statement that God became man or took upon himself the nature of man? Can the Omnipresent contract himself within the limits of space? Can the Omnipotent lay aside his omnipotence? Can the Infinite divest himself of his infinitude? Then he cannot become man or take upon himself the nature of man, for man is finite and

ignorant and weak, and it would be impiety as well as folly to say that of such properties or qualities God can ever be a partaker. Nor can the human mind and the divine mind be so conjoined or united together as to form one person. This again involves a contradiction, and contradictions are not to be admitted within the circle of our belief. I can well understand that the divine mind can be brought into close and intimate communion with a human mind. I can believe that the divine mind may be so present to the human mind as to cause that presence to be felt in a peculiar and extraordinary manner. I can imagine that the mind of God may so act upon the mind of man as to make it the organ and instrument of his wisdom and power. And I believe that between God and Christ this kind of communication or communion did exist. It is what our Lord himself asserts, and for me his assertion is enough. But he does not say—the Scriptures nowhere say—that he and the Supreme Being were so united together as to form one person. And the creeds that do say so, say what in my view is an absolute impossibility. To maintain that the divine and human natures can be united together, that is, that Infinity and finiteness, Omniscience and ignorance, power unlimited and power that is limited, can exist together in the same person, or be predicated of the same being, is a proposition which, the moment the terms of it are understood, must be instantly rejected as utterly incredible. Qualities which are the opposite of each other, one of which is the negation of the other, can never, with propriety, be assigned to the same person.

To any one who will take up and read without prejudice or prepossessions of any kind the history of Christ as related by the Evangelists, nothing, I think, can be

clearer than that it is the history of one who, instead of claiming for himself an independent existence, uniformly refers all his wisdom and his power to a Being superior to himself. There is no occasion for quoting particular passages to prove this, for they are spread over the whole of the New Testament. The course which I am pursuing is not to show how frequent and how forcible is the language of Scripture in favour of the strict Unity of God (for this cannot be denied), but my object is to demonstrate the impracticability, nay, I would say, the impossibility, of reconciling such language with the commonly-received doctrine of the Deity of Christ. I know that by its supporters this reconciliation is thought to have been accomplished, but I maintain that it has not; and more than this, I assert that the way in which this has been attempted, that the construction which they who hold this doctrine are obliged to put upon the language of Christ, is, of itself, sufficient to condemn it. I say that the interpretation given by them to the statements of the Evangelists, and especially to the words of Christ, is so monstrous, so revolting to common sense, so directly opposed to their obvious meaning, as to excite in my mind the profoundest astonishment that any one could have had the temerity to advance it. Observe for a moment how Christ speaks of himself. *I can of mine own self do nothing. I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who hath sent me. My doctrine is not mine but his that sent me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him. I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. Now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God. The Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I*

should say and what I should speak. If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. In that day ye shall ask me nothing. I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. My Father is greater than I. How is all this, and much more of the same kind, so expressive of Christ's dependence upon and subordination to a higher Power, to be reconciled with the doctrine that he himself is God? In this way, it is answered. In his one person were combined two natures, the human and the divine; and the language spoken by him in the passages just cited was spoken by him as man, and not as God. Now admitting the possibility of the union of the divine and human natures in the same person (which, however, I maintain *not* to be possible), I cannot admit the right of any one to put such a construction upon our Lord's words as that just mentioned,—a construction which would subject him to the charge of equivocation and subterfuge, than which nothing could have been more abhorrent to his whole nature. You,—I might say to such an interpreter of his words,—you presume, for the purpose of accommodating them to your own preconceived notions, to assert that our Lord meant by them the very opposite of what they obviously *do* mean. Where is your authority for so doing? Where has Christ given the slightest intimation that what he said was to be thus understood? If you have not his sanction for it, then justice to the character of the Saviour demands of me an instant and utter rejection of it. If it had proceeded from any one who was not a Christian, I should unhesitatingly have

pronounced it a gross calumny. Coming as it does from sincere believers in Christianity, I of course entirely acquit them of any such purpose, but I cannot acquit them of too readily acquiescing in a mode of interpreting our Lord's words which is so directly opposed to their plain, natural signification, and so totally at variance with the character of him in whose mouth there was no guile, who ever "spake openly to the people, and in secret said nothing." Even if he had possessed a double nature; to suppose that he could so avail himself of it as to declare, without reserve, that he knew not this and was unable to do that, meaning only that he could not do it and did not know it in respect to one of his natures, though he *could* do it and *did* know it in respect to the other, is a supposition which, one would think, requires only to be clearly stated to meet with immediate and strong condemnation. For myself I must say that it is impossible for me to believe, unless he had so declared it, that such could have been the meaning of our Saviour. Not having this sanction, I cannot, with any regard to sincerity and truth, give the slightest heed to it. If there be any other way of explaining the language of Christ which may be thought to be consistent with the notion of his being the supreme God, I am ready to listen to it, but to the one just mentioned I cannot listen; no, not for a moment; for it comes to me in the shape of a mere expedient ingeniously devised to bolster up a favourite hypothesis, and therefore to be at once repudiated and disowned. The conclusion then deducible from the language of Scripture, and more especially from that of our Lord himself, is, that in the strict and proper sense of the word he is not God, but one who, though holding high and inti-

mate communion with God, is still dependent upon him and subordinate to him, deriving from him all his authority, and receiving from him all his endowments.

My next position is, that there are certain facts recorded in the Scriptures with which the common doctrine of Christ's Deity is totally and irreconcileably discordant. It is well known that the Jewish dispensation not only teaches that there is one God, but emphatically that there is no God *but* one. Accordingly this was the ancient faith of the Jews, and so continues to be. They believe now, as they believed from the first, that God is one being, one person. And with this belief their worship accords. It was and is confined to one object, and to one object alone. I state this, observe, as a fact; and from this fact I reason thus. If the views which the Jews held in our Saviour's time respecting the Unity of God, and the proper object of divine worship, were imperfect and defective,—if they were so far short of the truth as we are now told they were, would Christ have given no intimation of this deficiency? Would he have been content with passing it over in entire silence? But not only did he thus pass it over—not only did he say nothing and do nothing to correct their error, if in error they were, but the language which he used tended strongly to strengthen and confirm them in the convictions which they had entertained. So far from intimating that any other construction was to be put upon the declaration of Moses than that which the Jews had always put upon it, he actually repeats it, and in the very words of the lawgiver himself, saying, *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.* He places it in the very front of the first commandment as the great truth upon which that commandment was properly founded. In

further confirmation of the same point I would also remind you of the conversation which took place between our Lord and the woman of Samaria. Referring to the people of the nation to which she belonged, he says, *Ye worship ye know not what. We,*—including himself among the number—*we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.* He adds, *the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father.* Now, if Jesus had been conscious that he was, equally with the Father, entitled to supreme religious homage, *would* he, *could* he, have expressed himself as he has here done? Would he have contented himself with saying that the Jews were right in holding the doctrine of one only God, and that the true worshippers were they who worshipped the Father? Of the impression which this fact may make upon the minds of others, I can of course say nothing; but to my own mind it carries a conviction which is hardly less than certain, that Christ had no more idea of his being himself, in the strict sense of the word, God, than the woman to whom he had been speaking.

I now pass on to the mention of another fact leading to the same conclusion. We read, then, in the gospels, that immediately after the baptism of Jesus the spirit of God descended upon him. Now, how can we reconcile such a statement as this with the doctrine of his supreme Divinity? We are told in the popular theology that the divine and human natures were united together, and constituted the one person of Christ. If so, to what purpose is this descent of the Holy Spirit, this divine communication of wisdom and power? If Jesus were already a partaker of the Godhead, what need was there of inspiration from above? Possessing a divine nature, with what higher power could he be clothed; with what

greater wisdom could he be endowed; with what more commanding authority could he be invested? The very fact that illuminations were shed down upon him from on high, preparatory to his entrance upon the labours of his mission, and to accomplish him for the great work in which he was about to engage, is a manifest proof that he was not an independent being, and therefore not the supreme God.

The next important fact, confirmatory of the same view, is the conduct observed by the apostles and first disciples towards Christ during their intercourse on earth. Through the whole course of his ministry our Lord was treated by them with a familiarity altogether inconsistent with the belief that he was their God. They lived with him; they ate and drank with him; they remonstrated with him. One of them even went so far as to rebuke him. Peter denied him in his presence, and almost all of them, when they saw that he was condemned to be crucified, forsook him and fled. Now these are *facts* which no one who has read the gospels can possibly deny. But they declare more plainly than words can do, that the Apostles did not regard Jesus during his life-time on earth as the very and eternal God. Let us place ourselves, in imagination, in their circumstances. Let us suppose that, like the Apostles, we had been present with Jesus during his public ministry, and that in the course of that ministry, the mighty truth had become apparent to us, that the Being we had so often consorted with was no other than the everlasting God himself, incarnate in a human body. How should we have been affected by such a discovery? Would not our whole conduct towards him have become instantly changed? With what awe and reverence should we not ever after

have approached him! With what a strong and unrelaxing grasp would the idea have been fastened to our minds! What a deep and indelible colouring would it have given to every thought and sentiment connected with so mysterious and awful a Being! Turn now to the conduct of the Apostles, and then say whether you can observe anything of this great revolution in their feelings and deportment. Read over the accounts of their conversation with Christ almost up to the moment of his crucifixion, and ask yourselves whether the disciples could ever have thought that they were conversing with their God. Did they believe that it was the Maker of heaven and earth whom they were deserting, when they fled from the scene of the cross? If not, then it is clear that during his ministry on earth he was not regarded by them as their God. From this, consider what is the necessary consequence. Observe the important conclusion that comes out of this fact. It is this; that all those passages in the discourses of Christ which have been supposed to teach his supreme Divinity were considered by the Apostles to teach no such doctrine. For, if they had so understood them—if they had inferred from them what has since been inferred from them, their conduct must have been very different from what we know it was. Hence, I conceive, we have the authority of the Apostles themselves for asserting that in their estimation Christ taught no doctrine inconsistent with that expressed in the text, "To us there is but one God, the Father."

But new light, it may be said—it has been said—dawned upon the minds of the Apostles when Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. They might then, when the scales had fallen from their eyes,

have been led to see what in their previous darkness they had been unable to perceive. But where is the proof, where are the traces of this? So far from there being any token or indication of the supposed change, all that we read of the preaching and conduct of the Apostles, as recorded in the book of the Acts, is one strong continued testimony against such a supposition. On the memorable day of Pentecost, immediately after the effusion of the Holy Spirit, Peter, standing up in the midst of the Jews, thus addressed them: "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders, and signs, which God did by him . . ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. . . This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*" And he concludes his address with these words: "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.*" I ask, therefore, is it within the compass of reasonable belief that the Apostle Peter in the very freshness and ardour, as we are told, of his new convictions, should have begun his address to the Jews by calling Jesus of Nazareth a man approved of God, and concluding with the declaration that by God he had been raised from the dead, and by him had been *made* both Lord and Christ? I believe it impossible for him, under the circumstances supposed, thus to have acted; and to contend that he did, is to destroy all criterion between truth and falsehood, and to set at nought the most clearly ascertained laws of the human mind.

The discourses of the Apostle Paul, as reported by the Evangelist Luke, are all in perfect unison with those of the Apostle Peter. At Antioch, at Athens, before

King Agrippa, his testimony to the resurrection of Jesus and to the power and authority which God had conferred upon him, is full, clear, and conclusive. But in none of his addresses will you find one word concerning the Deity of Christ; not one word concerning his equality with the Father; not one word implying more than the divinity of his doctrine and office.* Why herein is a marvellous thing. Here is a book called the Acts of the Apostles, containing an account of the preaching of the Apostles Peter and Paul to Jews and Gentiles for several years after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, but nowhere do we meet with a single expression in reference to what we are now told is the great doctrine of Christianity, but on the contrary we see much, very much, that is diametrically opposed to it. Surely of all strange things, this must be reckoned the strangest and the most inexplicable.

The mention of one other fact is all that I shall now include under this head of my discourse. We know that the Apostles, as soon as they went forth to preach Jesus and the resurrection, met from the Jews with the fiercest opposition. Various accusations were brought against them, but among them there was not one that charged them with preaching Christ as their God. They

* Should any one object to this statement, and refer to Acts xx. 28, "Feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood," in proof that Paul here gave to Christ the title, God, I have only to say in answer, that the true reading of the passage is "Lord," and not "God." "Of manuscripts," observed the late Dr. Pye Smith, "all the most ancient and the most valuable, the Alexandrian, the Ephrem, the Cambridge or Beza's, read 'church of the Lord.' Of the Fathers, this reading is supported by Irenæus, Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and many others."—*Scripture Testimony of the Messiah*, vol. iii. p. 65, 2nd ed.

were accused of turning the world upside down. They were accused of endeavouring to overthrow the religion of their fathers. They were reviled and denounced as heretics and apostates. They were stigmatised and despised as the followers of a crucified man, of one who died the death of a malefactor. But not a syllable of reproach or blame was ever uttered against them for inculcating the doctrine of Christ's supreme Deity. Now there is nothing of which we can be more sure than that if such a doctrine had been taught by the Apostles, it would have formed one of the first and foremost of the objections that would have been urged against them. But then it may be said, though no opposition, on this account, was made to the Apostles, the Jews *did* make it the ground of objection to Christ. True, they did; and it is my solemn and deliberate opinion that the way in which our Lord met this objection furnishes alone an ample refutation of the doctrine imputed to him. I mean to say that in the answer given by Jesus to the cavil of the Jews, he denies that there is any ground for charging him with making himself God, or equal with God. We read in the tenth chapter of John's gospel, that on our Lord's declaring that he and his Father were one,—one, that is, in mind and purpose, in spirit and intention, in affection and action,* — the Jews accused him of

* That this is the true meaning of the words, "I and my Father are one," is evident from the use of similar phraseology in John xvii. 20—23. "Neither pray I for these alone," says Christ, "but for them also who shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; THAT THEY MAY BE ONE EVEN AS WE ARE ONE." Here Christ is his own interpreter of the words above mentioned. We have here his own explanation of them. He distinctly states in what sense this

blasphemy, saying, that being a man, he made himself God. To this accusation, what answer does Jesus return? Give, I beseech you, your closest attention to it. It begins thus: "*Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods*?" Now for what purpose are the Jews reminded of this fact,—of the fact that the word God was sometimes given to persons high in power and authority, to princes, magistrates, and judges? It could only be for the purpose of showing that even if he had assumed this title, they would not, on that account, have been warranted in drawing from it the conclusion they did. Jesus might have called himself God in the same sense and for the same reason that Moses and others were so called.* Thus our Lord argues. "*If*," says he, "*those were called Gods to whom the word of God came, say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God*?" The reasoning of our Lord is clearly this. If I had taken upon myself the name of God, I might, as one of those to whom the word of God came, have been justified in so doing; but he adds, as if to deprive his accusers of every pretext for what they had alleged against him, I have only called myself the Son of God. A more direct and positive disclaimer, on the part of Jesus, of his supreme Divinity, could not have been given. Were there no other passage in the Bible to which the Unitarian Christian could appeal in behalf of the sole Godhead of the Father, he might confidently point to this as alone sufficient to establish it.

unity between God and himself, is to be understood. He prays that he and his disciples may be one, as he and the Father were one. They were one, says Milton, in love and unanimity of will.

* See Exod. vii. 1; xxii. 28. Ps. lxxxii. 6.

It may be said perhaps that the Scriptures speak of God's being in Christ and dwelling in Christ. We grant that they do. It is expressive of a truth to which we not only assent, but in which we cordially rejoice. We understand by it the especial presence or communion of God with that beloved Son in whom he was well pleased. That this is its true signification is evident from the fact that the same or similar phraseology is applied to ourselves. God is said by the Apostle John to dwell in us and we in him; and the Apostle Paul expresses an earnest desire that the Christians whom he was addressing might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now if such language may be used of *us*, with how much greater force and propriety may it be used of *him* to whom the Spirit had been given without measure! But surely the presence or communion of God with any being, however intimate this communion may be, does not make that being God. When God is said to dwell in the temple, the temple does not on that account become God. When God is said to be in us of a truth, we are not forthwith to be accounted Gods. When the Spirit of God is said to dwell in our minds, they are not changed into the Spirit of God. That God was with Christ, that God dwelt in Christ, is a truth necessary to our admission of his divine authority. It is on account of this union, of this relation between the two, that we hail and rejoice in Christ as our instructor, master, deliverer and saviour. The point of difference between us and those of our fellow Christians who are opposed to us, is not, whether between the mind of Christ and the mind of God there was not an intercommunion which rendered the one the fittest revealer and interpreter of the will of the other, but whether they

were truly the same being, identified by the possession of a common nature, and common attributes. It is against this opinion that we protest as unreasonable and unscriptural, contradictory in itself and involving the Scriptures in contradiction; loading Christianity with the weight of objections which ought not to be imposed upon it, and enveloping the character of Christ in such a cloud of mystery as greatly to mar its simplicity and impair its beauty.

There are passages of Scripture almost without number, to which I might appeal in vindication of the doctrine that "there is one God, the Father;" but avoiding as much as possible all verbal criticism, the bandying of text against text, my object has been to show what the clear uniform tenour of holy writ is. Admitting the existence of a few expressions which, at first sight, may present some little difficulty to the common reader, I must still contend that language so explicit as that which lies before us in the New Testament, and facts so undeniable as those which I have referred to, are sufficient to outweigh a hundred arguments depending upon grammatical niceties, and that the one great truth blazing out from every part, from almost every page of Scripture, ought not to be overshadowed or eclipsed by a sentence or two the exact meaning of which may at present be hidden from us.

The hypothesis of the two natures in Christ, the divine and human, is so unauthorised by any statement from our Lord and his Apostles, and the interpretation given by it to the plainest and simplest words is of so violent a nature, so unparalleled in the history of language, that I cannot but greatly wonder at the general reception it has met with. Phrases,—such as I, my-

self, mine own self,—that never before had but one sense, that always bore a distinct definite signification, are invested by it with a double meaning, now indicating one thing and now another, as the necessity of the case may require. The gospels, for the most part so transparent in their style, so intelligible in their statements, are transmuted into the most mystical and enigmatical of books, and in going through them we are puzzled and perplexed at almost every step of our progress.

With many theologians of the present day,—while they allow that the three first gospels have nothing in them opposed to the strict doctrine of the Divine Unity, —it is the fashion to maintain that it is otherwise with respect to the writings of the two Apostles, John and Paul. Here, say they, are traces to be found of another doctrine, of that which is assimilated to the Deity of Christ. Now granting that there is a shade of obscurity hanging over a few passages in the gospel of the one, and that a few ill-understood figures of speech occur in the Epistles of the other, it is a striking and remarkable circumstance that the books of the New Testament, which carry with them the strongest and most decided testimony in favour of the doctrine of the text, are precisely those which are inscribed with the names of John and Paul. It is in the gospel of John that Jesus is made to say, My Father is greater than I. It is in the gospel of John that the true worshippers are declared to be they who worship the Father in spirit and in truth. It is in the gospel of John that our Lord addresses the Father as the only true God. It is in the gospel of John that we read of his disclaiming any higher title than that of Son of God. It is in the

gospel of John that we are told of his forbidding his disciples to pray to him, but to address their supplications to the Father through him. It is in the gospel of John that we find him assuring his brethren, just before his ascension into heaven, that he had the same God and Father in common with them. And finally the Apostle John himself, as if to prevent all misinterpretation of his language, expressly declares, towards the conclusion of his gospel, that his object in writing it was to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

This assurance, coming as it did directly from the Apostle's own lips, together with what he has recorded of the discourses of Christ, is abundantly sufficient to refute the notion that he taught a different doctrine from the other Evangelists. It stamps as worthless the coin which first came out of the mint of the Platonizing Fathers, and which, after being taken up by some of the German Divines and receiving from them a fresh polish, has since been imported into this country and brought into circulation among us. For a while it may, with some people, answer its purpose, but it cannot abide the test of a thorough and faithful examination.

What I have said of the Apostle John may be said also with equal justice of the Apostle Paul. He too speaks of Christ in terms which clearly imply that he is not what the so-called orthodox represent him to be. It is Paul who writes, To us there is but one God, the Father. It is Paul who says there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. It is Paul who announces that as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. It is Paul who says of Christ that for his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, God

hath highly exalted him and given him a name above every name. It is Paul who declares that as the head of every man is Christ, so the head of Christ is God. It is Paul who asserts that Christ is the first-born of every creature or the chief of the whole creation, and that he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. And it is Paul who, in one of the most striking passages of that most eloquent and beautiful chapter, the fifteenth of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, proclaims that the time cometh when Christ, having subdued all things to himself, shall become subject to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all. It is hardly possible for words to set forth more plainly and powerfully the sole Godhead and supremacy of the Father than those which are here adopted by him. If the Apostle had designed to set at nought all arguments for the Deity of Christ, I know not where he could have found any terms so well fitted for the purpose as those which he has actually employed. After speaking of Christ as the Son exercising sovereignty over a kingdom in which all things were to be brought under his sway and controul, he then adds, that when this great end is accomplished, this magnificent triumph is achieved, he, the Son, is to deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and to be himself subject unto him, that God may be all in all. In clearness, in force, in fulness of expression, what can go beyond this?

The loftiest titles that are given to Christ should occasion no surprise when we consider who and what he was, the important office which he filled, the extraordinary powers with which he was endowed, and the intimate relation in which he stood to God. But, on the other hand, if the Apostles, after his ascension, had regarded him as

their God, *would* they, *could* they, have described him as inferior, and subject to God? As one pre-eminently favoured by God, and holding the closest communion with him, it was perfectly natural that he should sometimes be spoken of in terms almost as dignified as those which were applied to the Supreme Being himself. We know that the representatives of Majesty are not unfrequently addressed in a style very similar to that which is addressed to Majesty itself. But it would be most unnatural, and contrary to the usage of all language, to give to an independent being, names and epithets descriptive only of a dependent being—to represent him who has all power within himself and of himself, as holding his authority and deriving his power from a superior. This, I say, would be a phenomenon inexplicable and unaccountable, and for which, I believe, the writings of the Apostles are not, in the slightest degree, responsible.

In fine, the language of Christ everywhere is the language, not of God, but of one commissioned by God, and acting under the authority of God. He always referred the works which he performed, not to any intrinsic power of his own, but solely to the power of his Father. He constantly prayed to God, looked up to him for strength and consolation, and when about to expire on the cross commended to him his departing spirit. What stronger proof can we have of the inferiority of Christ to the Father than the language of submission, dependence, and supplication, which was ever on his lips? In accordance with this are the representations of the Apostles. They also describe him as a prophet raised up and inspired by God; as approved of God; as honoured and glorified by God; and exalted by him to be a prince and a Saviour. Speaking of his power and authority, their

language is, "It *pleased* the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. God *giveth* not the spirit by measure unto him. He hath *given* him authority over all flesh. He hath *given* him authority to execute judgment." This is the strain in which the Evangelists and Apostles constantly speak of Christ, and that strain could not possibly have been adopted towards one whom they knew or believed to be their God.

Here, then, I must close the Scriptural argument for the doctrine of the text. A few further observations are yet to be offered, but they shall be as brief as I can conveniently make them.

There may be those who are ready to say, Why trouble yourself about such an abstract question as that which has now been brought before us? Our aim and object should be to make men more religious, more virtuous, more real, genuine Christians in their daily life and conversation, and not theological polemics. From this I do not, in the main, dissent. I admit that if our thoughts and endeavours were not directed to this purpose, we should be wanting in a just appreciation of our obligations and our duty. Neither I, nor, I believe, are any of my brethren, in the habit of dwelling much on a point not immediately connected with practical piety. Our public ministrations are devoted, for the most part, to the inculcation and enforcement of duties, actions, and dispositions which are essential to the Christian character, which constitute the substance of the Christian life. The doctrines of the gospel may form the basis of our religious and moral instructions, but they are seldom made by us the subject of distinct argumentative discussion. Nevertheless, it appears to me that occasions may and sometimes do arise, when it is necessary for us, as

faithful ministers of Christ, to stand up in the maintenance and defence of what we believe to be important truth, and while we are earnest in enforcing the precepts of the gospel, not to neglect and disregard the principles on which they are founded. We say here as our Saviour said upon another occasion, These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

With respect to the Unity of God, Is this, I ask, a doctrine which is held up to us in the Scriptures as of little or no importance? If this *were* the case, how can we account for the prominence which is given to it, both in the Jewish and Christian dispensations? We may be sure that neither Moses nor Jesus would have been so emphatic in their assertion of it, placing it as they have done at the very head of the commandments, if it had not been regarded by them as one of the greatest moment. In maintaining, therefore, the doctrine of the Divine Unity, we are but obeying the injunction and following the example of Moses and the prophets, and of Him who is greater than the prophets. We cherish the conviction, and delight in the contemplation of it, not only on account of its majestic simplicity and its intrinsic grandeur, but chiefly because of its close alliance with all honourable and delightful views of the character of God, and because it is the sheet anchor of a firm and durable faith, of that faith which connects reason and piety and hope and charity in one great bond of everlasting union. They who think that we unduly estimate its value and importance should tell us why a departure from it has almost always been followed by the reception of other doctrines, which we feel to be repugnant to our reason and revolting to our hearts. How is it, I ask, that gross misconceptions of the nature of God have been every-

where attended with gross misconceptions of the character of God? If there were no tie that linked the one to the other, why is it that they are so generally found co-existing together, and seldom or never apart and separate from each other? It is notorious, that let a man pass from a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity to that of the strict unity of God, and the result commonly is, the rejection of other popular doctrines, such as those of original sin, everlasting punishment, and the satisfaction made to divine justice by the death of Christ. For this reason it is that we are desirous of forming for ourselves, and, as far as we are able, of imparting to others, just views upon this great question.

The plea of numbers is also sometimes set up in opposition to the truth of Unitarian Christianity. How, it is asked, can it be reasonably supposed that that which is rejected by the great body of Christian professors has any just claims upon our belief? Which is most probable, that the majority should be in the right or a small minority? I am well aware of the effect which such an argument is calculated to produce upon the minds of the ignorant and unreflecting, but that it should be received by the enlightened and the thoughtful with any other feeling than that of contempt would indeed be to me a matter of no little surprise. For to what does this kind of reasoning lead, and where would it land us? When has religious truth been on the side of mere numbers? Was it in the days of the prophet who complained that of all Israel there were only seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees unto Baal? Was it at the moment when Jesus was brought before the tribunal of Pontius Pilate, and the people cried, Crucify him, crucify him? Was it during the long period of the middle

ages, when spiritual despotism trampled upon every free thought, and the minds of men were kept in bondage to the most abject superstition? Was it when Wickliffe arose, and, like the sun, "shot orient beams" through the darkness that covered the land? Was it when Luther replied to the thunders of the Vatican with a voice of bold and determined defiance? Why, the history of society, the history of science, the history of morals, the history of religion, all show that the greatest truths, those to which our minds are fastened with "tendrils strong as flesh and blood," have been established or transmitted to us by the labours of a few; by the triumph of their reason over the reason of the many. What principle that ennobles and exalts the nature of man, what pillar that adorns the temple of God's true worship, ever arose out of a prostration of the will of the minority to the will and the prejudices of the majority? Was not the propagation of the gospel itself the work of individual minds, in opposition to the opinions and wishes of the great mass of mankind? If any weight were due to the argument depending upon numbers, it might be turned in favour of Polytheism over pure Theism, of Mahometanism over Christianity, and of Romanism over Protestantism. It is therefore utterly worthless as an evidence or a sign of truth. But if it were, the Unitarian has, even upon this ground, something whereof to boast. He may refer to the period when, after the way which men still call heresy, the great body of Christian believers worshipped the God of their fathers. For the first two centuries of the Christian era, the multitude calling themselves by the name of Christ, adhered firmly and tenaciously to the doctrine of the Divine Unity, as opposed to that of the Trinity. And though by means of philosophy, "falsely

so called," it was at length well nigh buried under a heap of errors and corruptions that had been brought into the Christian church, there never has been a time, at least since the human mind was awakened from its lethargy and roused into any degree of intellectual activity, when it has not received the assent and the homage of some of the greatest, the wisest, and the noblest of men. Yes, among the most gifted of our race, whether we would speak of philosophers, of poets, of scholars, or of Divines, we have a cloud of witnesses to point to, that may well make us content, as far as human testimony and sympathy are concerned, with the evidence which they present in behalf of our faith. There is no Christian community that can furnish a list of men who have done more for the defence and illustration of the records of our religion than they who are to be found in the ranks of Unitarianism.* Their services on this head none can dispute or deny. Of them, indeed, the bitterest of their opponents are continually availing themselves. Through them it is that they are furnished with means and appliances for most effectually resisting and repelling the attacks of unbelievers. Shame upon us then, if we are insensible to the claims which they have upon our admiration and our gratitude, or if we lightly regard the grace and the honour which they have conferred upon our cause, and which may readily be accepted by us as no slight compensation for the want of popular favour.

* I subjoin here the names (illustrious they may be truly called) of some of the leading Unitarians who have distinguished themselves in the maintenance and defence of the divine origin of Christianity. I would mention Dr. Samuel Clarke, Dr. Leland, Dr. Foster, Dr. Nathaniel Lardner, Sir Isaac Newton, John Milton, John Locke, Dr. Law Bishop of Carlisle, Dr. Price, Dr. Priestley, Gilbert Wakefield, Andrews Norton, Dr. Channing, and Dr. Palfrey.

Another mode of speaking in disparagement of our views of Christian doctrine that has lately become rather prevalent among a certain class of religionists, is, that they have fulfilled their purpose—that they have accomplished the work for which they were intended, and are now destined to give place to something greater and better. To me, I own, this sort of language appears most strange and unintelligible. It is too transcendental for my comprehension. It dwells in the regions of mysticism, and soars above the grasp of my conceptions. What! Is that which was once a doctrine of the gospel to become, in the course of time, a doctrine no longer? Can that which was once a Christian verity ever cease to be a Christian verity? I thought that truth was one and unchangeable. I thought that Christ had said, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not pass away." And I thought that among those words this was to be found, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and HIM ONLY shalt thou serve." Talk of the unity of God passing away, and of the time when it is to give place to something nobler and better! What can it mean? What is intended by the assertion that this and the doctrines of which it is the source and centre, and around which they revolve in delightful harmony, are no longer to shine as stars of the first magnitude in the religious firmament? Can the immutable and eternal God, He, who is described by the Apostle as without variableness or the shadow of a turning, be at any future time other than he has been? Can his perfections be increased or diminished? If single and one now, must he not be single and one for ever? If good and merciful now,—inherently good and spontaneously merciful,—will he not be so universally and for all time to come?

Then, I say, the Unitarian doctrine will not, cannot pass away. There is nothing grander or better to which it can give place. It remains the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Of course I do not include in this statement any of the subordinate points which may sometimes come under the general designation of Unitarianism. I speak only of the great leading doctrines which constitute the essence, the substance of our faith, and which alone are characteristic of that which is common to all. With respect to this faith, I do not deny that our conceptions of it admit of growth and enlargement. They may become clearer and brighter with the progress of our minds in knowledge and wisdom, and with the deeper insight of our souls into the things of the Spirit. All I contend for is, that in itself considered, and as it came out of the hands of Christ, it is subject neither to change or decay, but will endure from everlasting to everlasting.

It is my firm and settled conviction that if people did but understand the language employed in the popular creeds and confessions of faith—if they did but annex clear ideas to the words made use of, they would at once perceive the absurdities and contradictions in which they are involved. They would shrink with instinctive dread, from the terms which are sometimes applied to the Supreme Being, such as God-man, Triune God, incarnate God, a bleeding God. They would regard it as nothing less than profane to invoke the Deity, as is done in the Litany of the Established Church, in language like this —"by the mystery of thy holy incarnation—by thy holy nativity and circumcision—by thy baptism, fasting and temptation—by thine agony and bloody sweat—by thy precious death and burial." That He who is a Spirit, and who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth,

should thus be addressed in prayer by Christian tongues would have been deemed a thing impossible, if habit had not made it familiar to the ears of those who utter it, and blinded them to its monstrous import. It cannot be alleged in excuse that the prayer is offered to Christ not as God but as man; for no orthodox believer contends that Christ, as man, in his human capacity, is an object of religious worship. This plea, therefore, will not avail them, or if it did, the worship so offered would amount to absolute idolatry. See, then, into what gross practices and inconsistencies men are sometimes betrayed by the unscriptural doctrine of the Deity of Christ. As long, however, as they go on using words and phrases in unthinking compliance with custom and without considering what they really imply—as long as they are content with prostrating their understandings before the shrine of human dogmas set forth in the darkest ages of the Church, they may truly be said to believe they know not what. Could they, for example, be brought to a clear perception of the consequences to which the hypothesis of the two natures in Christ necessarily leads—could they be made to feel how unnatural and violent a construction it obliges them to put upon the language of Christ—language which, if it were employed by any other person in a similar manner would subject him to the charge of equivocation and double dealing—if, I say, they saw it in this light, they would, I believe, instantly abandon it. But it comes to them clothed in the garb of mystery, and thus disguised its real character and significance are not understood.

Upon the principles of Unitarian Christianity, the gospels, for the most part, read like plain intelligible books. They record the life, labours, sufferings, death and

resurrection of one raised up by God for an especial purpose, endowed by him with extraordinary powers, and holding with him constant and intimate communion. On this account,—because of the relation thus sustained by him, he is regarded by us as our Teacher, Lawgiver, and Saviour; as one upon whose words we may safely rely, to whose commands we are implicitly to bow, and by whose ministry we are brought into a state of reconciliation with God. Taking along with us, as we read the Christian records, this view of the person, office, and character of Christ, we see that it perfectly harmonizes with the general tenour of Scripture. The Unitarian, in the statement and exposition of *his* principles, enters into no subtle speculations about the nature of God. He has not the presumption to put forth any theory or hypothesis concerning the Divine essence. He takes up the Scriptures, and says, Here lies the distinguishing article of my faith, expressed in language than which nothing more positive and explicit can be desired. No obscurity hangs over it. It is not enveloped in mists and clouds. It presents itself in the volume of the New Testament as well as of the Old, like the angel standing in the sun.

But how is it with his orthodox brethren? Are *they* content with what they find plainly revealed in the sacred writings? Are *they* satisfied with the terms there employed? Have *they* formed no theories,—have *they* indulged in no subtle speculations about the divine nature, the divine essence? Fully to express their views, are they not obliged to adopt other phraseology than is to be found in the Scriptures? It is notorious, that in all these respects *their* conduct is the very reverse of that pursued by the Unitarian. *They* are not content with the simple language of the New Testament. *They* are not satisfied

with the words of our Lord and his Apostles. Finding it impossible to make their doctrine square with the plain signification of these words, and in order to reconcile the one with the other, they have had recourse to a certain theory or hypothesis respecting the nature of God, for which they have not one atom of Scripture authority,—dividing the Godhead into parts or portions, assigning to one this office, and to another that, and speaking of essences and hypostases, and substances and processions, as if they had been admitted within the veil, and had been allowed to gaze upon that which no mortal can behold and live.

From mazes and labyrinths like these, our views of Christianity withdraw the mind altogether. We want not the aid of metaphysical subtleties to give them form and expression. They are best seen, and are best exhibited, in the very words of Scripture, which declare, not only that God is one, but that that one God is the Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know, then, in whom we believe. We know what we worship. We know by whose direction,* and after whose example, we say, when we pray, Our Father who art in heaven. Pursuing this course, and not striving to be wise above what is written, we would keep our minds from plunging into depths beyond their power and skill to fathom.

And, now, brethren, let me say in conclusion, that

* John xvi. 23—*In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you.* Why is not this direction of our Saviour more generally complied with? Nothing, apparently, can be plainer or more direct than it is, and yet how little in conformity with it is the general practice of Christians.

so far from desiring such discussions as the one in which we have at this time been engaged, glad should we be to see the day when they would be needed no longer. Glad should we be to hail the advent of the time when all Christians may unite together as disciples of the same Saviour in the worship of the universal Father; when that worship should form the basis, as it alone can do, of a genuine comprehensive Catholic Church, and when the names Unitarian and Trinitarian should be lost in the one wider and better name of Christian. But till that time come, if ever in this world it is to come, let us, with the mildness and charity due to others, and with the firmness and steadiness becoming ourselves, bear witness to what we believe to be the truth, and never shrink from confessing that to us there is but one God, the Father. Let the world see that we have been with Jesus, that we have embraced a religion which is not only rational but devotional and practical, which has not only entered into our heads but into our hearts, which has not only exercised our judgments, but has touched and warmed our affections, and sent life and vigour into our moral constitution. But if the truth has no charms for us, and we are ready to barter our principles, and to traffic with our consciences—if we cannot rise above temptation, nor oppose a manly and dignified resistance to the attacks of the tempter,—if the veriest trifle will suffice to keep us away from the house of prayer, and to break in upon the holy exercises of that day of rest which is as needful for the soul as for the body,—if this be the case, we shall do no honour to the name by which we are called; nay, we shall be throwing stumbling-blocks in the way of others, and hindering, as far as our influence goes, the success

of that cause which we profess to serve. The one thing needful, then, without which all else will avail nothing, is a character consistent with our profession. This is a homage to our principles which all *can* render, which all *should* render, and without which no cause can be expected to prosper. To illustrate and adorn the faith which you profess by the rectitude of your lives, and the benevolence of your temper, and the unaffectedness of your piety, be this your sovereign pursuit; be this your sovereign praise.

THE END.

Richard Kinder, Printer, Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF A PROFICIENCY IN HUMAN LEARNING TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER; WITH A REFERENCE TO THE MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, ABOUT TO BE REMOVED TO LONDON.

A DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN

LITTLE PORTLAND-STREET CHAPEL, LONDON,

BEFORE THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

At its Annual Meeting, May 18, 1853.

By WILLIAM TURNER, Jun., M.A.

OF HALIFAX.

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A DISCOURSE.

2 Corinthians ii. 16:

"Who is sufficient for these things?"

One of the principal subjects on which St. Paul addresses his Corinthian converts, is suggested by the manner in which some of them had been seduced by certain false teachers. Among the characters which distinguished these persons, seems to have been an overweening self-confidence, widely different from the modesty and humility observable in the authorized servants of Christ, impelling them to put themselves forward into an office for which they were unprepared and unfit,—the natural and necessary consequence of which was, that they brought error and serious mischief upon those who listened to them—confusion and disgrace upon themselves.

It seems to have been this circumstance which led the apostle frequently to dwell on the importance of the office assumed by a teacher of gospel truth, and excited the exclamation of the text, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who is competent, when not authorized by the sanction of Him who is head over all things to his church, to guide the disciples

into the right way, to speak with authority as to the purport of the moral and spiritual condition of mankind? However he might be inspired by an ardent zeal and an eager desire to promote the improvement of his fellow-creatures, who would not shrink from such a contest with a deep feeling of his insufficiency, if he were called on to measure his own strength against the powerful and formidable antagonists with whom he would have to contend?

Such is the spirit of personal humility displayed even by the great apostle of the Gentiles, when comparing the vastness and importance of his work with the extent of his own means, independent of Christ who strengthened him. When appealing to his revered Master in one of those periods of personal communication with which he appears to have been favoured, under the influence of this humble spirit, and in terms perhaps not unlike these of our text, he is met by the encouraging and decisive reply, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It was on this grace accordingly, and on the outward testimony which did not fail to accompany it, bearing witness by the works of the spirit that he spake not the words of man's wisdom, but by the power of God, that he relied for his sole but his all-sufficient support.

From these and from other indications, we may not unreasonably infer what would be the conduct, the language or the advice of St. Paul, if, with the same dispositions and views, and the same earnest desire to promote in the most effectual manner his Master's cause, he could now be consulted on the measures to be adopted in carrying forward this great work. The gifts of the spirit, as displayed in

the supernatural works by which the first preaching of the gospel was assisted, are now indeed withdrawn; but the same Divine Wisdom at all times directs the ordinary course of nature for the spiritual welfare of the children of men; and in the same spirit of humble and devout reliance on the Divine favour, it becometh us to apply to the greatest advantage the natural means of usefulness with which we have been entrusted, and which are alike, in a just and important sense, the gift and inspiration of the Almighty. Without travelling into remote countries to explore the regions where heathen darkness still prevails,—when we contemplate nearer home the enemies of man's salvation,—when we think how much remains to be done before the light of the gospel can be said to be generally diffused even in a Christian land, before the truth as it is in Jesus shall be generally known and professed,—when we think how much labour is necessary fully to acquire, and how much more successfully to explain and recommend, this knowledge,—and, above all, how much earnestness, energy and enlightened zeal is now and will ever be required so to enforce it as to give it the influence which it ought to exercise over the hearts and lives of its professors,—we may well exclaim, with the spirit and in the language of the apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

To the most active and zealous servant of God the impression would be a painful one, were he not at the same time convinced that the grace of God working with him is all-sufficient,—that he is himself only an instrument in the Divine hands, working perhaps along with other and nobler instruments in modes which as yet he is able but indistinctly

and imperfectly to understand, but in which his faith in an all-directing Providence leads him to repose the most implicit and unhesitating trust. Thus it will be with all those who devote themselves heart and soul to this great work. The cause *itself*, they perceive, is adequate to occupy and exercise the best and noblest gifts; it is the cause of God, and deserves that all the talents he hath himself bestowed should be exerted in contributing to its success. But it not only *deserves*, it *demands* for its complete accomplishment far higher powers than have ever been granted to or attained by any mortal. They will feel and acknowledge that it is, properly speaking, without limit, and consequently tasks and overtasks whatever abilities they can bring to the labour in which it calls upon them to undergo.

We perceive, therefore, that the sentiment which prompted this exclamation was not only most suitable to the condition and prospects of the apostle, to the momentous objects of his mission, and the arduous labours in which he was engaged for their accomplishment, but may also be adopted by every one who undertakes in a humbler sphere to follow in his steps. The more exclusively his thoughts are engrossed by these objects, the more clearly does he perceive that they deserve to engross them, and the more deeply is he impressed with the inadequacy of his labours, or those of any other mortal, to accomplish them in all their extent. They grow and swell in his imagination; they mix themselves with every other object of desire, in proportion as it appears to be really worthy to excite the desires of a rational being; and he feels how far they surpass his highest powers and most earnest endeavours. The great

objects of God's providence in the moral government of the world, require the co-operation of his rational creatures, and consequently the cultivation and development of the powers with which they are endowed for that purpose. Not that the assistance of weak man was, in any proper sense of the word, *necessary* to bring about the designs of the Creator, but that He has thought fit in his wisdom so to associate his creatures with himself, with a gracious and merciful view to their own improvement. Such a man, feeling himself to be, as it were, a fellow-worker with God, will be conscious of an elevation and true dignity of character, tending to raise his soul above the vain pursuits and seducing temptations of this world, and to set his affections upon things divine and heavenly, worthy to occupy the thoughts of a rational and immortal spirit. How much more noble, how much more worthy of a creature destined and preparing for heaven, to take an active interest in the great concerns of the creation of God,—in the physical, the moral, and, above all, in the spiritual welfare of man, than to be wholly absorbed in sensual and selfish pursuits!

If this is to be received as at *all* times a just description of the circumstances and duties of those who are called upon to labour in the cause of God, of Christ, and of the best interests of their fellow-men, how peculiarly appropriate must we consider it when applied to the times in which we live! Whoever looks around him in this busy, spirit-stirring age, must be deeply convinced that there is work, very important work, to engage the hearts and hands of all who feel that they have talents entrusted to them which can be fully occupied and

improved only in the service of God and of mankind. When we behold on every side all the active principles of human nature in a high state of excitement, exerted in various directions under the influence of various motives, in many cases for unworthy purposes of mere personal or party aggrandizement, but in others, and these often on a noble and truly animating scale, for the purpose of advancing the moral improvement of man, and his most valuable interests both here and hereafter,—and when we see the boundless field laid open for the exercise of our best powers, and all the means of usefulness placed at our disposal in many an honourable career of enlightened and active benevolence, and the struggle which must often be waged against the powers of darkness in the meanness, the selfishness, the pride, and other bad passions of degraded humanity,—we may well cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But when we behold the victories from time to time achieved over these agents of evil by the devoted servants of God and their brethren, let us feel strengthened, as St. Paul was, by the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee." However sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency, he rejoiced, and his true followers will do the same, in being called on to minister, though it may be in a limited and imperfect manner, to the furtherance of this great work. They will remember with pious gratitude that it hath pleased the Author of all good to appoint that every beneficent plan for the improvement—moral, social or religious—of the human race, shall be mainly carried into effect by the instrumentality of human agents, whose energies are roused, whose best and noblest powers are thus called into

exercise, whose benevolence and piety are exalted, enlivened and purified, by the consciousness of being in this manner called upon to contribute to the divine work of doing good to the bodies and souls of men.

Certainly, when we consider the importance of this work to the present and everlasting welfare of all who are interested in its success, it will be seen, that to render a man in any manner sufficient for these things, there is needful much and diligent preparation. He must be assiduously occupied in acquiring a knowledge of himself,—of human nature in general,—of the past history of the world,—of the former dispensations of religion preparing the way to the last and best gift of God to his creatures,—of the consequences of the attempts so repeatedly and but too successfully made to engraft on the pure doctrine of the gospel the corruptions of heathenism, and the baseless speculations and refinements of human philosophy,—of the gradual but partial reformation of these abuses,—of the arguments drawn from reason and from scripture, in support of what he believes to be pure and undefiled religion. With a view to this, he must be familiar with those researches and studies which are necessary to enable the diligent inquirer to attain the clearest insight into the true meaning of the sacred writings. These, and such as these, are the occupations and pursuits in which, now that the days of supernatural illumination are gone by, that man must be assiduously engaged, who is desirous, not only to acquire for himself a clear understanding of divine things, but to communicate this knowledge to others, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The observations which have now been made seem to be plain, even to self-evidence; and yet an apprehension has occasionally been expressed that some of our friends are not so fully persuaded as their fathers were of the indispensable necessity of this kind of intellectual training for the Christian minister. Of course no one will contend that the accomplishments of literature, theology, philosophy or science, are in themselves a sufficient equipment for a well-furnished soldier of Christ. In addition to these talents, there is a training of the heart and the affections, a surrender of the soul to God, a thorough conviction of the supreme importance of the work, and a consequent attachment and devotion to the labours it may require, which are not less necessary, and which go to constitute what the apostle John calls "an unction of the holy one," not less intrinsically valuable in the present circumstances of the church, and still more essential to the acceptance of any service we can render to our Master's cause. But the greatest possible diligence in cultivating this moral and spiritual preparation will not by any means supersede the intellectual. It will rather create a more impressive sense of its necessity; and tend to promote and facilitate an assiduous study of those mental gifts and attainments in learning and science, which, when thus combined, may become sanctified and blessed as the means of rendering the most acceptable services to God in serving our fellow-creatures. For such dispositions and pious affections, if they are formed in a truly rational understanding, and enlightened by good sense and sound judgment, will only add more strength to the motives which impel the

Christian student to seek after all the human knowledge within his reach, which is capable, directly or indirectly, of being turned to the service of religion.

And what kind of knowledge is there which is not capable of being so applied? Shall we say, that a knowledge of the works of God has no tendency to enlarge our views of the perfections of their Author?—that to trace the successive events and mighty revolutions which mark the history of the world, may not throw light on the order of his providence and the history of his moral government?—that a diligent study of human nature is not fitted to assist us in forming some conception, however inadequate, of that Divine Nature in whose image it was created? More immediately and directly is it fitted to strengthen the influence of practical religion, by giving us a juster knowledge of ourselves, of our character in its strength and its weakness, its frailties and easily besetting sins. And if such exercises of the understanding and the acquirements to which they lead, are conducive, in a mind otherwise well-disposed and prepared, to the growth of personal religion, must they not also furnish the means of exercising a salutary influence over fellow-disciples, among whom the light that has been gathered may be diffused, whose minds may be enlightened, whose hearts may be warmed, whose affections may be purified and directed to worthy and holy objects by assiduous instruction and earnest persuasion.

Such, in short, is the mutual connection of the different branches of human knowledge, that each is capable, to a certain extent, of throwing light on every other, and, above all, on that central study

toward which they all tend, and in which they may be said to terminate, and for the sake of which their cultivation is chiefly desirable,—the study of the nature and constitution of man, and of his duty and expectations as affected by his relations to his Maker. No doubt they have different degrees of importance; and as life is short and opportunities limited, we feel it necessary to exercise a principle of selection. But still, we may fairly conclude that there is no one of them which the Christian minister will justly consider as absolutely unworthy of his regard, and as having no tendency to strengthen his hands for the work to which he has devoted himself. There is no one of them which may not in conceivable circumstances increase his influence and add to his means of usefulness.

The importance of *theological* learning to the Christian minister (especially of that branch of it which is more peculiarly fitted to assist him in ascertaining and illustrating the true sense of the sacred writings), in order that he should be found sufficient for these things, is not indeed more real in itself, but is more easily demonstrated, and one might presume would be universally acknowledged in these days, when a spirit of inquiry and a thirst after knowledge, both on this and on all other subjects, is so widely diffused among all ranks. The time has been when many of those who laid claim to the character of ministers of Him who preached his gospel to the poor, were wont to represent it as essential to the well-being of society to keep the poor in ignorance, and discourage the spread of that instruction which might ere long lead them to inquire and think for themselves. But that time, we

trust, is quickly passing away; and the very parties who once set their faces against the poor being taught at all, are now only eager to engross the teaching of them to themselves. At all events, we trust the work is in the way of being done;—and therein we rejoice, and will rejoice. But in proportion as a desire of knowledge and the means of obtaining it are more generally diffused among all classes of the people, it becomes more and more necessary that the teachers of religion should be able to supply them with a reason for the faith they have been taught to profess. For in proportion as the *masses* (to use a common designation for those who constitute a large majority of every community) advance in general information, they both are and ought to be less disposed than formerly to accept any principles or doctrines *without* a reason. Perhaps it is equally true, and not less important to bear in mind, with them as with many others of higher pretensions, that in proportion as they advance in the *conceit* of knowledge, they are apt to fancy it a mark of superior wisdom to assume the character of sceptics, and to reject, with or without a reason, what they suppose to be received by the generality of mankind. And it is consequently desirable that the minister of religion should be prepared to deal with this very common and prevailing propensity. It is desirable that he should be able to place the real truth before them in a distinct and perspicuous form, in such a manner as to conciliate their attention and assent, and thus lead them to perceive and acknowledge how little they had been entitled to pronounce dogmatically on these subjects. And he will be the more likely to do this acceptably and

effectually, if his intercourse with them has not been limited to matters immediately connected with religion,—if he is already known to them as a man of extensive information upon other subjects,—if his acquaintance with general literature and science has made him useful in his neighbourhood, or given him influence in the management of institutions destined for the improvement of themselves and their families.

I trust I need hardly add, that neither the one nor the other will be of much avail in promoting his influence as a religious teacher and adviser, unless he is also felt to be a religious man, whose principles are deeply fixed, not merely in his understanding but in his heart, with the strength and liveliness of a practical faith, ruling all his life and conversation;—if he does not bring into his intercourse with his brethren, not merely the correctness of sound doctrine, but the warmth of Christian benevolence and brotherly love. Whatever other subjects he studies, religion will be the principal thing;—they will be the *means*, this the *end*, from their subserviency to which they derive their chief, if not their only value in his estimation. Let all his endeavours to acquire as extensive and accurate a knowledge as possible of sacred literature,—of the works of nature, which are the works of God,—of the constitution of man and of human society,—of the arts and discoveries which have resulted from the cultivation and improvement of the human faculties,—be accompanied by a diligent assiduity to make every new acquisition an additional instrument of usefulness, in instructing the ignorant, promoting the cause of religion and virtue, and thus preparing himself and others for that state in which

our present acquirements shall be looked back upon as the amusements of children!*

No one who is attentive to the signs of the times, and is at all in the habit of intercourse with the more intelligent and inquiring of the labouring classes, can fail to perceive that there never was a period to which the remarks we have now been making were more applicable than the present. Whatever we may think of the proposal, now so vehemently discussed, of confining education, as authorized and supported by the State, to what is called *secular* instruction, no one, I imagine, will allege that the instruction should end there,—that nothing should be made the subject of direct and positive teaching except what has an immediate reference to this world and its pursuits, and that the great concerns of eternity should be left to take their chance. Every thoughtful observer of the present tendencies of society, especially among the lower classes, must, I think, be painfully convinced that there is a strong disposition, not only to reject what the nurse and the priest have taught, but, in doing so, to consider the claims of religion in every shape as unworthy of regard. This disposition arises in a great measure from a strong dislike of certain theological dogmas of the Church and other prevailing sects, with which, in the absence of any other sources of information or instruction, it is not much to be wondered at that they confound the genuine doctrine of the New Testament; taking it for granted that the large majority of the professed followers of Christ must be received as faithful and reliable expositors of his doctrines. Deceived

* See Note, page 31.

by the sound of certain passages in our authorized version, they are led to ascribe doctrines to the Scripture at which their reason revolts, and which their hearts and understandings alike prompt them to reject, as unworthy of a Being of infinite wisdom, of unspotted holiness, of boundless compassion and mercy. It too often happens that these things disgust them, and they abandon the belief and profession of religion altogether. But if not, they are glad of assistance from some one who may guide them,—not by substituting for the commandments of God the authority of men, but by communicating in a simple and popular form the results of careful inquiry and research, whereby what is dark may often be illustrated, what is perplexed and difficult explained.

It appears, then, to be above all things desirable that such persons should be supplied with the means of acquiring a knowledge of more just and rational views of these subjects, and that our ministers should be enabled to place these views in such a form as may be effectual to protect them from the dangers and snares of scepticism. For this purpose missions have already been undertaken in various parts of the country, which have not been without their desired effect in convincing many that the rejection of Calvinism does not involve the rejection of Christianity.

I have thus endeavoured to shew that the accomplishments of a learned education are highly valuable to the Christian minister in his intercourse with the lower classes of society. That they are equally, if not more important, in promoting his influence with the higher and more educated classes, will hardly

be disputed. It is not to be expected that he should take the place which is due to his character and position with this class, either of his hearers or of society at large, if he is felt or believed to be *below par* in literary attainments or general cultivation of mind. Their respect for his character and deference to his opinion or advice will be the greater, in proportion as he is competent to set before them a salutary example, in applying extensive and accurate knowledge of men and things in illustrating the principles of genuine religion, "looking through nature up to nature's God." It also becomes the Dissenting minister, at least, to remember, that whatever beneficial influence he can exercise, or whatever service he can perform, must proceed from his personal qualifications, and not from any official character sustained by him as a *priest*, or person claiming to do in that capacity what any other individual of like attainments has not an equal right to do, or may not do with equal effect. He will find none to submit to the assertion of any sacerdotal pretensions, as though he were entitled to lord it over his Christian brethren by virtue of some fancied apostolic descent or authoritative ordination. Whatever talents or learning he can bring to the service of the sanctuary, he will be at full liberty to exert to their utmost extent,—but his *office*, and the title of Reverend which he enjoys by courtesy, will go but a very little way of themselves in adding to their efficacy; nay, they will be worth less than nothing, if there is reason to think that he is decidedly inferior in the attainments or character which should attend them.

As I have already hinted, the Christian minister

has a duty of this kind to perform, not to those only with whom he is more immediately connected, but to the community in general, which cannot be discharged as completely as might be wished without something more than the average amount of attainments in literature and science. The Christian world is now in a course of almost unprecedented intellectual advancement,—a course which, as far as we can judge from present appearances, is destined to go on with still increasing rapidity. But it does not therefore follow that a corresponding progress will take place in the moral or spiritual condition of the people. Those who take the most favourable view of the existing state of society will hardly contend that such a progress has been hitherto observable. It is perfectly possible (as more instances than one in the past history of mankind fully prove) that knowledge and mental cultivation may increase in a certain limited class, while ignorance and vice are more and more the characteristics of the great mass of the community. It is perfectly possible that all classes may advance together to a certain extent in the mere acquisition of knowledge, and yet there shall be no proportionate advancement in what constitutes the true improvement and happiness of mankind. Just as a progress in the arts of life, and the other elements of what has been called *material civilization*, has often been carried to a great length, while the social and political condition of the people is lamentably degraded. These principles acting alone upon society cannot be trusted to effect any real, substantial and permanent change for the better in the condition even of the present state. They must be combined with the salutary corrective of

sound morality and pure religion, without which they may only furnish a weapon to be placed in the hands of the evil-disposed, to execute more effectually the purposes of iniquity. There are too many already who are well prepared and wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

The minds of men around us are in movement; they are agitated by varied and strong emotions; they are already furnished with new and attractive light; they are seeking, and will soon be provided with more. Surely, then, it is most desirable to use every precaution, that this light may not be such as to dazzle, bewilder or perplex those who receive it; but that it may be clear, distinct and pure,—fitted to guide them into the right way, to enable them to perceive, to dispose them to pursue it. And the greater the number of those who in every rank of life are themselves prepared by sound instruction and judicious education to assume the guidance of public opinion, to perceive and enforce the just principles of morality and religion on which all solid and truly valuable improvement must be founded, the more firmly secure will be the best interests of the human race.

Much, it is hoped, may be done in this way, when the same individuals who are set for the defence and diffusion of religion, and for promoting its practical influence among their brethren, take a prominent place also among such as lead the way in the extension of useful knowledge, and whatever conduces to the refinement and civilization of social life. By their agency, it may be hoped that these instruments of good will be sanctified—consecrated to more exalted and holy purposes. The labours

which were in the first instance devoted to the external, the material, the temporal well-being of man, under their guidance will be the means of furthering his spiritual and moral development as a creature destined for immortality, and thus rendering this world not only the most like to heaven, but the fittest preparation for it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that I would look to them alone to exercise this corrective and purifying agency. In fact, when left *alone* in this work, they are comparatively powerless. There are few more serious drawbacks on the practical influence of Christian principles on society, than the prevailing habit of looking upon these subjects as the special and exclusive business of a particular order of men, whose *profession* it is to enforce the claims of virtue and religion. The consequence too often is, that those who do not belong to the profession are led to fancy that this is an affair taken out of their hands, with which they have no concern. Hence they are apt to bestow on these things only an occasional and passing consideration, and forget that the duties of the household and the concerns of active life, both in public and in private, should be always, habitually and invariably, conducted upon Christian principles. The objects for the sake of which we unite in the formation of a church or religious society, are most likely to be attained when the different members, instead of leaving all the work to the minister, are ready, according to their ability, to take an active share in it,—thus drawing closer the bonds of union, greatly increasing the practical benefit to themselves, and strengthening the minister's hands for the work properly allotted

to him. In this respect, therefore, it behoves every one who acknowledges the truth and value of the gospel, to consider himself as not only a *disciple*, but a *minister* of Christ; and it is not until *all* are brought thus to feel and act upon a due sense of their obligation, that religion can take its proper place as the controlling principle of action in the human mind and in human society.

Since, however, the conduct of public worship and other considerations render it necessary, or at least highly expedient, that a body of men should be set apart and expressly devoted to the ministry of the word, it is especially important that they should be qualified and prepared, as they cannot but feel it to be their duty, to do what in them lies to give a religious character, as far as possible, to all the principles which tend to modify the condition of a Christian community in a state of high and advancing civilization. They will take to themselves the just and striking similitudes which our Lord applied to his immediate followers—"Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world!"—and will remember also the solemn and awful warning, if the salt should be found to have lost its savour, if the light that is in them should prove darkness.

The view we have hitherto taken of this subject is, for the most part, one which we may presume that Christian ministers of all parties, and of every variety of doctrinal opinion, would consider as applicable to themselves. But surely the Unitarian may be, above all, expected to perceive the importance and necessity of human learning to him who either seeks to attain a thorough knowledge of religion himself, or proposes to communicate it to his brethren.

Others may be contented to place their reliance on the authority of the *church*, as entitled to decide in matters of faith; or perhaps they may persuade themselves that opinions maintained and sanctioned by a large majority of professing Christians must needs be a fair representation of the truth, and so be contented to receive implicitly what they find prevailing to the largest extent. But *he* has precluded himself from accepting such guidance as this, and he has no resource but to apply for a knowledge of the truth at once to the fountain-head. It is there, and there alone, that he can hope to obtain the pure waters of life; and there, consequently, it behoves him, above all others, to be qualified to seek for it.

It becomes him, moreover, to bear in mind that he is a member of a little flock, in mere numbers comparatively insignificant,—but though a sect every where spoken against, exercising, nevertheless, an influence greatly exceeding in many respects what might seem to be due either to their numbers or to their social position. To what can this be ascribed but to the fact, that they have, or *have had*, the reputation of a higher standing than some others in the world of theology, literature and science?

It may be thought by some, and I will not dispute it, that in as far as this suggestion is well founded, we have enjoyed a reputation which is in some measure not our own, but inherited from our ancestors. The Unitarians of the present day are to a great extent the descendants and representatives of the Presbyterian party among the early Nonconformists. It is superfluous to remind any one here that this name, as denoting a certain form of church

government, has at no period during the last century and a half, been a fit designation of the body of English Dissenters who have received it. Considered merely as a denomination, it denotes a class of persons who are distinguished from almost all other religious parties by the consistent assertion of the right of individual inquiry and judgment, and by refusing subscription to any articles or creeds of human formation. But they have also been honourably characterized, in every period of their history, by a more than ordinary solicitude to keep up a high standard of literary accomplishment among the more educated portion of their body, and more especially by the stress which they have laid on the maintenance of a highly educated ministry. No sooner did they find themselves excluded from the (so-called) *national* seats of learning, than they made the utmost exertions to procure for the young men destined to the ministerial office, all the advantages of this kind which their adverse circumstances permitted. They reckoned in their number not a few of the most eminent men for talents and learning which this country or that age could boast,—several of whom, long before the Act of Toleration, devoted themselves to the honourable, but the ill-requited, and, in those troublous times, not seldom dangerous office of training up successors who should as far as possible maintain the reputation of their fathers. In this connection, the names of *Frankland*, *Woodhouse*, *Warren* and others, are deserving of grateful remembrance.

The influence of such men had a powerful and permanent effect on the community to which they belonged, who, in subsequent periods of comparative

peace and tranquillity, have never ceased to maintain the same diligent cultivation of theological learning, and of all other moral and mental endowments, by which the Christian minister might be thoroughly furnished for the most satisfactory discharge of his important work. The private seminaries and public institutions which were established from time to time for this purpose in different parts of the country, would furnish the materials for one of the most interesting chapters in the history, not only of religion and of Protestant Dissent, but of mental cultivation in general in England, during the eighteenth century. Amidst all the difficulties and discouragements arising from limited resources, from the want of those external appliances and means which opulent universities could supply, and from the confined scale on which most of them were unavoidably conducted, it will be found, nevertheless, that from these humble establishments proceeded no small portion of the most eminent scholars and divines who adorned the literature of this country through the greater part of that period. At least, there can be no question that, regard being had to their limited numbers, the Presbyterian Dissenters contributed much more than their share of men deservedly distinguished in the literary history of the age,—of men who, by their writings, their instructions and personal influence, powerfully promoted the progress of mental culture, the cause of general education, and the diffusion, not merely of theological, but of all kinds of useful knowledge. The private seminaries of *Jones*, *Grove*, *Hallett*, *Latham*, *Rotheram* and others, which were succeeded by the more regularly constituted establishments.

maintained by public subscription under the auspices of the general body, at Warrington, Exeter, Hackney and Manchester,—in the varied circumstances attendant on their rise, progress and decay, sometimes apparently prospering for a while, and then struggling for a precarious and generally short-lived existence,—amid all their vicissitudes, never failed to train up worthy sons of the prophets, well prepared to render good and substantial service to the cause of free inquiry, sound learning, and pure, undefiled religion.

I should be very sorry to think with some, who have alleged that we their descendants have degenerated from the high standing and character of our fathers in these respects. Nor am I prepared to acknowledge it,—notwithstanding that I apprehend it must be admitted that we no longer either receive, or are entitled to, that precedence which seems to have been conceded to them in the public estimation, as compared with the other denominations of Dissenters. My persuasion is, that whatever change of relative position has taken place of late years, is due to the increased attention paid to theological learning and mental culture in general among our orthodox brethren, rather than to any falling off among ourselves. But if this be so, it surely furnishes an additional motive to our ministers, especially to our *young* ministers and those intending to become such, on whom the character of the coming age, as far as we are concerned, must so greatly depend, to use the more diligence and assiduity, that they may at least not be left behind in this laudable competition. It should also stimulate us, and every member of the body whom in

a certain sense we may be said to represent, to take care that these our valued friends and respected servants shall have every facility afforded for this purpose which it is in our power to procure for them. A salutary spirit of emulation might excite us to this; but we have, or ought to have, higher and better motives. If we have any regard or value for those characteristics which distinguish us from other denominations,—if we think our peculiar opinions conformable to reason and to scripture, favourable, when consistently maintained and carried out into practice, to the formation and adornment of the Christian character,—if we wish to provide, as far as possible, for the continued profession and wide diffusion of that which we most approve, we shall not view with indifference any exertions which are necessary or plainly conducive to the accomplishment of this desirable object. Least of all will it be imagined by any Unitarian Dissenter that the temper of the present times is such as to render it unnecessary to place in our advanced posts a succession of men able and ready to take up the gauntlet thrown down by future *Wranghams*, *Wardlaws*, *Byrths* and *Tattersalls*;—of men competent by their literary talents and theological learning to assert for their doctrine its claim to be denominated a scriptural creed, and to shew that, however calumniated by the intolerant, or misconceived by the hasty, the ignorant or the misinformed, it presents the genuine characteristics of evangelical truth. The points on which, as Unitarians, we differ from our brethren around us, are such as scarcely allow of neutrality in themselves; or if they did, it is rendered impracticable by the exclusive assumption, so

often made by our opponents, of the Christian name, virtually or avowedly denying us the character, privileges and hopes which that name implies. Under these circumstances, the Unitarian minister should therefore be prepared, if necessary, to take up the character of a controversialist;—honestly and ably to do his endeavour that error may be checked, and bigotry mitigated, and corruption reformed, and the genuine doctrine of the gospel maintained and defended.

Few of my hearers can have failed to perceive the circumstances which have led me to think that the subject on which I have been addressing you was not unseasonable or inappropriate to the present occasion. We have been in the habit of taking credit to ourselves for laying more than ordinary stress on literary attainments and theological learning, as indispensable to the Christian minister. But how, it may be thought, is this to be reconciled with the fact, that the only institution now existing among us in England for promoting this object has been for some years in a languishing, declining condition? Has this been because it did not deserve to succeed? Far from it. On the contrary, it is not too much to say, that there never has been an academical institution among the Dissenters which surpassed it in the variety and excellence of the talents engaged in its different departments. Its affairs have at length reached a crisis, in which a considerable change in its plan and constitution is perceived to be unavoidable. After much and earnest discussion, terminating in an appeal to the Court of Chancery to settle certain real or supposed legal difficulties, its removal from Manchester to London

is now finally decided. Here it is to be limited to a theological school, to be placed in connection with University College. The advocates of this change anticipate that it will be attended by various advantages,—of which not the least may be, that by giving the students an opportunity of mixing freely with others of various opinions and connections, it may not only promote a greater enlargement of ideas, and counteract the almost unavoidable tendency in our private academies to a *one-sided* view of things, but prepare them, when they come abroad into the world, to adapt their ministrations more effectually to the wants and circumstances of society as it exists. Another advantage may be, that by bringing together the divinity students and the more liberally educated young laymen of our own connection, an increasing proportion of whom are now in the habit of resorting to University College, a friendly intercourse may arise, which may extend its influence into after life in a manner beneficial to both parties.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that though established for the express purpose of supplying the Unitarian churches with a succession of well-trained and competent ministers, and though in its new locality its warmest friends will probably be for the most part among the most active members of this Association, our Academical Institution will continue to be conducted on the same enlarged and liberal principles which have ever distinguished it, in common with all its predecessors in the Presbyterian connection. While others, Dissenters not less than Churchmen, have not hesitated to impose, both on tutors and students, the obligation of adopt-

ing, as the result of their inquiries, a certain prescribed mode of faith, the patrons of all our places of liberal education, with an honourable liberality, have not only permitted, but exhorted, all connected with them to exercise unchecked the same unbiassed liberty of candid inquiry and individual judgment which they asserted and claimed for themselves;—to examine carefully and impartially what is offered to them by their teachers, and to receive it so far, and so far only, as after such examination it appears to them to be justified by the evidence laid before them.

If any one should be disposed to refuse to an establishment conducted upon such principles as these the name of a *Unitarian* academy, and should have so little confidence in the truth or scriptural evidence of his leading doctrine as to be unwilling to trust it to this ordeal, we frankly acknowledge that we cannot recommend our institution to his patronage,—and we earnestly hope that it will never either need or deserve it. We value Unitarianism because, and only because, we believe it to be true; and we have too much faith in truth to fear anything from the results of the must free and impartial inquiry. We cannot suppose that there is any member of this Association who will feel it inconsistent with his views, as such, to give his sanction to this principle,—the only one, we think, which is worthy of a sincere and genuine lover of truth, who thinks he possesses it, and who values it as it deserves.

It is true that the Manchester New College, now about to be removed to London, and the Unitarian Association, are essentially distinct institutions; and yet I cannot but take it for granted that every

friend of the one will desire, and in his individual capacity seek to promote, the prosperity of the other. They have the same general end in view, though they follow it in different paths and by different means. This Association has its own department of the good work, in which it labours with a methodical steadiness and regularity, which betokens a well-considered system, and recommends it to the continued and increased support of the Unitarian public. And few, I apprehend, who compare together its objects and its very limited income, will be found to allege that its resources are more ample than the extent and variety of its operations justly demand. On the contrary, when we consider how much is done, and how much more might be done by the same agency, if the requisite moving power were at hand, we lament its insufficiency for these things, and earnestly call upon those who are able, to supply what is needful to carry it forward on the scale we could wish it to assume.

With respect to *both* these valuable institutions, we may well adopt that saying of our Lord, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." And may the God of truth hear the prayer with favour, and answer it with his blessing. Amen!

Note, page 15.

If these views and principles are to be borne in mind in the *exercise* of the ministerial office, surely they are also of importance in every stage of the preparation for it. It has been the object of the foregoing discourse to urge the value, the necessity, of human learning to the Christian minister; but the author hopes he has not explained himself so imperfectly as to be supposed to recommend that the student of such learning should be at any period so absorbed in these preparatory pursuits, as to withdraw his attention from what ought to be their main object. A young man destined for some of the merely *secular* professions or employments, may do this at times with impunity, or even with advantage; but I should be sorry to think that he who devotes himself more especially to the ministry of the word of God, from the period when he first begins to consider himself as set apart for this sacred office, should ever allow himself to lose sight of the great purpose of his life. In the ardour of his pursuit after minor incidental secondary objects, let him never cease to remember that these things, whatever others may think of them, are *for him* chiefly valuable as they may serve to strengthen his hands for his most important and indispensable work. Our students, it may be hoped, will not fail to seek, or to find, useful and appropriate occupation for a portion of their time, in Sunday-schools, Domestic Missions, and other kindred institutions;—and we have good reason to hope that, in their new position, those will not be wanting, whose earnest business and pleasure it will be to guide and encourage them in employments of this nature. By so doing, such friends will render valuable assistance in training not merely the heart and the affections, but in some measure the intellect also, to a fitness for the work in which they are afterwards to be engaged.

I have, indeed, heard it objected, that the employment provided for an undergraduate at University College, especially if he aims at distinction, is such as to occupy the whole of his time, and leave no room for attention to any other pursuit. If this be so, I should say it is much to be regretted. Very possibly the evil may arise in some measure from a want of sufficiently methodical habits and judicious arrangement of times and occupations on the part of the student; but still I fear there exists in our academical institutions a growing tendency, by increasing the stringency of public examinations and in other ways, to concentrate the atten-

tion upon certain prescribed subjects. This course, if carried to an extreme, is apt to interfere most seriously with other studies of not inferior value, and often even defeats its own object. For certainly the instances are not rare, of graduates who, after the stimulus of this artifical temporary extraneous motive is withdrawn, abandon in disgust the studies on which they had been constrained to bestow a disproportionate share of their attention. As to divinity students, if, as is often alleged, they cannot "go for honours" without forgetting for a term of years that they have any higher object in view, then I say that a conscientious aspirant to the Christian ministry will feel himself bound to forego these honours from men, as inconsistent with a proper regard to those sacred duties to which his life is to be devoted.

I repeat that I am not conscious of any inconsistency in expressing this opinion, and at the same time urging the cultivation of human learning on the Christian minister; for the fact is, that a real and substantial proficiency in any important branch of knowledge, is to be acquired, not by these paroxysmal efforts, but by the calm and temperate and persevering application of after life.

C. Green, Printer, Hackney.

THE

CHURCH OF THE FREE-BORN.

A Discourse,

PREACHED ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 1854,

BEFORE THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

AT ITS

TWENTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY MEETING, HELD IN THE NEW GRAVEL-PIT CHAPEL, HACKNEY.

By EDWARD HIGGINSON,

MINISTER OF WESTGATE CHAPEL, WAKEFIELD.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

THE PRAYER OFFERED IN THE INTRODUCTORY SERVICE,

By the Rev. J. J. TAYLER, B.A.,

PRINCIPAL OF MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

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PRAYER.

O God, Thou Father of our spirits, who hast given us understandings to know, and hearts to love, Thee, and through the life and doctrine of Thy Son hast spoken to the deep consciousness of the divine and immortal within us, hear us when we call upon Thee in his name. Fulfil now, we implore Thee, his gracious promise; and let Thy holy spirit, the Comforter, be amongst us and bless us, while we endeavour to collect our scattered thoughts, and to purify and tranquillize our hearts, in filial communion with Thee, and in earnest meditation on Thy word of eternal truth. All that we have and hope for, is from Thee; and when we realize to ourselves Thy solemn, benignant, all-surrounding presence, we feel that Thou art all in all. Our lives, O God, are full of mercies; and we desire to thank Thee, not for the outward blessings of life alone—for our happy homes and our many social privileges—for our internal peace and our equal laws and our prosperous industry—for our strength and riches as a people, and the ever-widening opportunities of advancement and instruction for all sorts and conditions of men amongst us; but more than all, and above all, for our spiritual blessings—for

the privilege of free access to Thee at all times and in every place, and for that mental liberty which permits us to search for truth in the love of it, to avow it without fear, and to apply its ennobling influences to the opinions and practices and institutions of the world.

Send down, O Lord, the power of Thy truth from the heads into the hearts of men, and from their hearts into their lives. We come to Thee. Do Thou accept and bless us. Help us to subject our whole being, in the spirit of self-sacrificing love, unreservedly to Thee. Give us to feel the power, and imbibe the spirit, and appropriate the vitality, of that holy and beautiful life, that sublime and significant death, which Thou hast permitted us, for our divinest encouragement, to look upon in the history of Thy Son. So strengthen us by Thy grace, that we may be ever ready, in the spirit of his life and his death, to sacrifice our private interests and our selfish inclinations to the cause of truth and the benefit of mankind; that living to Thee and Thy glory, striving to make our whole lives one act of religion, we may obtain from Thee a power that is not of this world—may cast our sins and our weaknesses behind us, and, in joyful reliance on Thy pardoning love to the truly penitent, may press forward, with hearts ever purer and spirits more free, to new conquests over ignorance and misery and wickedness, and a more entire communion of heart and life with Thee.

Lord, increase our faith. Give us faith in Thyself; faith in truth, and faith in righteousness; faith in the final issues of Thy good providence—in the final triumph of right and justice and liberty over

all the wrong-doing and oppression and tyranny which now afflict the earth, and hinder the free course of Thy gospel of love and peace among men. Uphold each one of us in steadfast adherence to our own convictions of truth and right; and what we ask for ourselves, dispose us to concede in utmost measure to our brethren. Open the eyes of our hearts within us, that, amidst the outward diversity of our human creeds, we may discern that common element of imperishable truth, which is a secret bond of sympathy and a hidden source of help and strength to all good and earnest and devout men. Draw them closer to each other by the influences of Thy spirit and the leadings of Thy providence, that their aim and their work may be finally one, and they may feel themselves but instruments in Thy hands for accomplishing Thy purposes, and establishing the reign of love and righteousness and peace over the whole earth. Shed abroad the pure spirit of the gospel of Christ in the hearts and lives of men. Put an end in Thy own good time to the creeds that perplex, and the churches that oppress, and the priesthoods that enslave and crush it; that one pure faith may bless, and one wide church embrace, the great brotherhood of men, bound together by the spirit of Christ, and united in the love of Thee, who art the Father of us all. O may that spirit of Christ penetrate to the hidden man of the heart, to renovate and sanctify it—to expel the carnality and selfishness which depress and smother the risings of a better and a nobler life—and to breathe into all our souls that gentleness and simplicity and humility and tenderness, that unreserved devotedness to Thee and Thy service, which befit

the followers of Christ, and are a pledge and a foretaste of the heavenly world.

O Thou God of the nations, bless our Sovereign the Queen, and establish her throne in righteousness. May her rule be guided by the spirit of justice and a respect for human rights; may it firmly resist the tyrant and oppressor, and ever be leagued with them that are contending for the highest interests of humanity. Abridge, O Lord, if it be possible, and bring to a speedy issue, the fearful sufferings and calamities of war. If they must for a time endure, help us to discharge this stern and terrible duty in the solemn fear of Thee; help us to prosecute it in the spirit of peace and in the love of human kind; and when it shall at length please Thee to permit us to put off the helmet and lay down the sword, may it be with the joyful and sustaining trust, that we are leaving an inheritance of unassailable peace to our children and our children's children, and that under Thee, by the might of our arm and the sacrifice of our blood, we have rescued the oppressed and humbled the oppressor, and brought reconciled nations to learn war no more. Amen.

A DISCOURSE.

Acts xxii. 28:

"And Paul said, But I was free-born."

In the Apostle Paul we have an eminent illustration of the harmony of all manly attributes with all Christian ones.

If the manifest gentleness of spirit which breathes in the gospel, if the prominence which it allots to the pacific and forgiving virtues, the blessings it pronounces on the meek in spirit and the sorrowful in heart, the developement it gives to the powers of patience and endurance (with especial reference to the coming needs of its first confessors and martyrs*), and its emphatic prohibitions of every thought of revenge (misinterpreted as these sometimes are into precepts of passive non-resistance†)

* "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake" (Matt. v. 11).

† "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (rather, that is, than requite eye for eye and tooth for tooth); and if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (rather, that is, than rob him by process of law in return) (vers. 38—40).

—if ever these scriptural attributes of our holy religion seem to betoken an unbalanced morality, an undue preference for the passive and the amiable qualities, and a neglect of those active, spirited and dignified characteristics to which the name of *manly* is especially devoted by men among men,—we have only to look from the occasional and partial Christian precept to the intire Christian example, for a sufficient corrective of this impression.

In the Saviour himself, "man of sorrows" as through his brief ministry he was, there is a constant dignity and self-possession that defy the imputation of an abject spirit; while in the Apostle Paul, our nearer model in his more varied experience of secular life like our own, himself the first clear representative too, as Apostle of the Gentiles, of the spirit of the gospel apart from its parent Judaism, and presented to mankind simply as human beings with human wants and human faculties;—in Paul, I say, we have the Christian's manhood vindicated from all misapprehension. We may quote him as the scholar and (in its true and worthy sense) the gentleman, to vindicate secular learning and social culture from narrow religious objections. And here we meet him, in our text, as a citizen, manfully standing up for his own rights as such.

Paul was a Roman citizen. The proudest civic franchise that the world knew was his by birthright. By what means his progenitors had obtained it, to transmit to him, is matter of mere conjecture. Tarsus was indeed, as he justly described it, "no mean city," boasting an antiquity so high as to be lost in fable, and having, through its geographical position, played an important part in the successive

histories of Greece, Syria and Rome. In the more recent Civil War, it had espoused the party of Julius Cæsar; it had been made a free city by Antony, and had obtained immunity from taxes under Augustus. But it does not appear to have been a Roman municipality, investing all its inhabitants with the franchise. The natural conclusion therefore is, that Paul's franchise was individual, not local, and that his father or some remoter ancestor had personally earned it; and there would seem to have been no more likely way open to its attainment by a man of Jewish race, than that of having served with merit (as many Jews had done) in the Roman armies.*

But, whatever the theory, the fact is undoubted. Paul of Tarsus was born free of Rome. He here manfully asserts his claim to the protection which the Roman law, by virtue of that franchise, threw over him. And his claim is allowed in all the further proceedings relative to his imprisonment and trial.

The points of privilege claimed by Paul as a Roman citizen were two. The first was exemption from the indignity of scourging. Truly magical was the effect of his few words in the ear of the centurion when the soldiers were beginning to bind his hands: "Is it lawful to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The Roman law shielded its citizens from the degradation of the scourge on all occasions whatever. A free-man was not to be treated like a brute or a slave. And the Roman patriots and orators were eloquent in praise

* See Grotius on the passage; Lardner's Credibility, P. i. B. i. Ch. x.; and Smith's Classical Dictionary, art. *Tarsus*.

of their country and its laws, as being thus jealous of the liberty of the subject. But how invidious, after all, was this Roman sense of honour! How narrow the Roman sense of manhood and of justice, which could without compunction apply the brutal scourge to an unenfranchised man, even uncondemned! Scourging was, in fact, the usual preliminary to trial; inflicted, avowedly, not as a punishment, but simply by way of eliciting evidence! The accused was beaten, and thus invited, by pain and fear, to criminate himself or others! The Saviour himself had been "questioned" in this manner before Pontius Pilate. He had been scourged, and then been asked, "What is it thou hast done?" Mark the very form of expression used. *To examine by scourging* was the full phrase; and so constant was the practice, that a shorter form of the phrase became current, as in the narrative before us, where "they that should have examined" Paul, means, *they that were going to scourge him;*—just as *inquisition* afterwards, a word in itself gentle, modest and almost supplicatory, implied the rack! That the Romish Church only adopted towards heretics (in more intense degrees indeed) the ancient civic process of republican and imperial Rome towards barbarians, is a humiliating parallel, alike for the greatest civic and the greatest ecclesiastical power in the world!

Paul had asserted his Roman citizenship once before, when with Silas he had been imprisoned at Philippi. But, in that instance, he did not avow it till after suffering the unlawful infliction,—doubtless because his companion had not the same right of exemption as himself; and so, with true, manly

delicacy towards Silas, he suppressed the fact till afterwards. But when the magistrates, alarmed by the tidings of the opening of the prison doors and the conversion of the keeper, sent to let the prisoners free, Paul resolutely and nobly replied, "They have beaten us openly and uncondemned, though Romans" (he does not grammatically distinguish—one of us being a Roman, though the other is but a Jew), "and have cast us into prison; and now, do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates; and they feared when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them and brought them out, and intreated them to depart out of the city" (Acts xvi. 37—39).

The other point of privilege connected with St. Paul's Roman citizenship is, the right of removing his trial from Judæa to Rome. Every Roman citizen might thus appeal from the provincial courts of justice to those of the metropolis. And, no doubt, the right was generally exercised, at least in cases of life and death. Accordingly we find, some years afterwards, in the well-known letter of Pliny to Trajan respecting the measures to be taken for the suppression of Christianity in Bithynia, that he proposes at once to send to Rome for trial such of the Christians as were citizens, making the option for them which he took for granted they would make for themselves. Paul, having been examined at Cæsarea before Felix, and being, after two years' imprisonment, brought before the new governor Festus, resolutely declines the proposal of a trial at Jerusalem, where he knew he had no

chance of justice; and, appealing to Cæsar, to Cæsar accordingly he is sent.

On this Roman citizenship the scene before us suggests one observation more. The centurion, somewhat enviously as it would seem, tells Paul that he had bought the franchise for a great sum of money. It was then purchasable, like the freedom of many modern cities. And when we bear in mind the words of Tacitus,* who incidentally calls the reign of the last preceding emperor, Claudius, an avaricious time, while indignantly relating that the Jews had in that reign bought permission to rebuild the walls of their hated city, we seem to have fallen upon one of those delicate, but important, because purely incidental confirmations of the genuineness and credibility of the gospel history, which so often arise on comparing the parallels of sacred and classical literature. No doubt, the avaricious reign of Claudius had found the sale of the citizenship an important source of revenue; and probably, in that reign, our centurion may have bought his "for a great sum."

The direct lesson taught us by Paul as a Roman citizen is, that a Christian, by becoming a Christian, does not forfeit his manhood, and may and ought, not the less, to value and use his civil rights;—a lesson not unneeded in many parts of the Christian Church, alike to give a more practical tone to the instructions of the pulpit, and to elevate our common daily life in the estimate of both preachers and hearers, who make and take religion to be too much an affair of holy times and holy places, and are con-

* Hist., Lib. v. C. xii.

tent that their mysterious life itself should pass on, day by day, and scene by scene, and relationship upon relationship, unconsecrated and unredeemed.

But there is a spiritual franchise, of which our Apostle was not less tenacious, and with proportionately more reason—his freedom of Christ's kingdom, of the city of the soul, of that kingdom of heaven upon earth, where religious knowledge, virtue, faith, hope, charity, all find their natural aspirations recognized, encouraged and guaranteed under the express Charter of Heavenly Love.

To the hereditary possession of this charter, Paul was not born. He was but a *freed-man* of Christ. He stood related to the gospel somewhat as the centurion to the Roman state. "With a great sum," of treasure beyond the worldly wealth which it cost him, he had obtained this freedom,—at the cost of his strongest habits of thought and habits of life, of his connections and friendships, his outward position and social influence, of all that was dear to his affections or stimulating to his ambition as a Jew of good station, of fine abilities and high education. All these things he had "counted as nought, that he might win Christ," when once taught by compelling miracle that Jesus was the Christ. And deep indeed was his sense of emancipation from the yoke of external ceremony and the spirit of fear, into the blessedness of the gospel, which he pours forth in frequent and earnest benediction upon the holy name to whose service he had devoted himself —"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ."

It was for the Christians of the next generation

to realize, if they could, the blessedness of being *free-born*,—of being born to that liberty of the sons of God, into which their fathers had been called by his special grace and adopted by his welcoming smile. It was for them to realize, if they could, the blessedness of having put forth their earliest growth of thought, feeling and character under the benign influence of the gospel, and of having been spared the awful struggle through which the moral heroism and self-sacrifice of their fathers had worked its way from out the trammels of the Law or the dark bondage of heathenism. But, alas! birth-privileges are not always so vividly appreciated as those which we have won through personal effort or cost; or they are apt to be soon felt as the ground of self-congratulation, rather than the motive to strenuous thought. But they ought to be made the vantage-ground for higher achievements. They ought to be felt as a solemn and blessed trust.

We are free-born,—we, and the offspring of Christian parents in every age,—we, who have never known in our personal experience what it is to be enslaved to ceremonial Judaism, or debased by polluting heathenism, or lured to perpetual disappointment by the meteor brightness of heathen philosophy. We are born to a spiritual freedom, which may indeed, theoretically, be man's by nature, but which, historically, was soon lost in polytheism, and never was restored by philosophy; while the special charter was divinely prepared in the pure Theism of the Mosaic Law, and deposited in the ark of its ceremonies, to be in due time published to the waiting and longing world, through him who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, by adding to their divine

truths and superseding their temporary and local observances.

The gospel is the renewal and legitimating of every genuine and natural religious aspiration. Always virtue was man's true interest. Always conscience was his best guide. But Divine Revelation has co-operated with human experience in enlightening that conscience to see more clearly what virtue is, and how exceeding broad are her commands, how blessed her hopes. In Jesus Christ this great enfranchisement is given. As in civic incorporations,—faint the metaphor and yet true,—the charters of earthly sovereigns may seek to guarantee a false or invidious good, and they may defeat their own purpose;—yet, like those truer civic incorporations which simply protect and guarantee the natural liberty of man with the combined power of society and law, and thereby give better opportunities for beneficial activity, this divine charter of Christianity guarantees the natural liberty of the human soul by special tokens of heavenly love; and, by the higher religious knowledge communicated, the pledge of spiritual help given, and the countenance and sympathy afforded in the presence of other souls free and blessed like itself, furnishes new materials and scope and encouragement to virtuous action and improvement.

We are free-born;—born to liberty, not to licence,—to the glorious liberty of the sons of God,—to the freest, healthiest, highest activity of our best intellectual and moral powers, as the very work and staple of our life, forming the perpetual sacrifice with which God is well-pleased,—to freedom from the demoralizing superstitions of false religion, from

the disheartening and depressing fears of religious ignorance,—to a freedom not merely negative, but positive; not the mere absence of oppressive restraint, but the acquisition of high purposes, of holy motives and of heavenly hopes. We are born to freedom of thought in the study of the works of Nature and the ways of Providence, where Science no longer sits darkling in gross materialistic theories, nor Religion needs to be jealous of the progress of Philosophy. We are born to free hope and effort for human improvement, under the consciousness of spiritual faculties and wants which the gospel alone has actively developed, and in the prospect of a spiritual immortality which it alone has ever credibly promised.

But how repeatedly has this birthright of Christian liberty been weakly renounced by those who should have cherished it! How often oppressively invaded from without! Spiritual freedom, alas! is not the characteristic thought of Christendom, though it be of Christianity. The history of the Church is a history of continual aggressions upon the spiritual liberty with which Christ had made his subjects free. I but remind you of facts so sadly notorious,—of the gradual but persisting growth of dogmatic theology, accompanied by the strange assumption of its saving efficacy, through the first four centuries, till faith was lost in creeds, and not only liberty of thought, but even the desire of free thought, seemed to be extinguished,—of the outbreak of the Reformation, which, in its very act still more than its avowed principles, asserted the inalienable freedom of souls true to God and Christ, yet soon saw its own leaders presumptuously mea-

suring the liberty of others' thoughts by the extent of their own conclusions, and proposing to arrest the re-awakened conscience of Christendom, and give it in safe keeping thenceforth to synods within the church, or crowned heads and parliaments above it. I remind you of the re-assertion of their Christian franchise by the English Puritans, who, in their deep devotedness to conscience, struggling through the strong dogmatism of their orthodoxy, gradually, though slowly, began to recognize the sacredness of consciences differing from their own;—how difficult a lesson to understand in those times!—and I remind you, most pointedly, of the well-known history of your own English Presbyterian ancestors, who, though not holding the abstract principles of Independency, founded the most completely independent of churches, as the one practicable means of asserting their religious freedom; and who, as the result of their painful experience in the vain endeavour to obtain a comprehensive national church, gave the world the first examples of religious societies recognizing within themselves all practicable latitude of opinion, free from the terrorism of orthodoxy, and giving room for future growth or change.

The importance of the service done by these societies, both to religious sincerity and to theological knowledge, by their indirect and reflected influence upon general society, is incalculable. Great religious questions, by being kept open to reverent discussion among them, have maintained their claim to that respect in the public mind which is never really felt where their discussion is suppressed by the strong arm of the Church or the State. The religious bodies around us, which seem to foreclose

inquiry and repudiate progress, have been stirred, by the infection of example, to intelligent thought. The dark, malignant creed of Calvin has, in South Britain at least, been softened into something gentler and vaguer even than Arminianism.* Even the Church of England, without altering her formularies, has been forced to recognize great latitude of opinion as existing among her clergy, and still more among her laity; though this, indeed, is a very mixed good, and its good is prospective rather than present, the immediate moral evil being so palpable and deadly,—the evil of a changed or a manifold belief, with an unchanged and uniform and very minute doctrinal confession. Truly our little leaven is leavening a great lump!

But the blessedness of the free-born *themselves* is what I would now chiefly dwell upon. Perhaps it is scarcely appreciated by ourselves, except when we read or hear the sadly different experience of those who, having been brought up under what are called orthodox impressions, have painfully but heroically struggled afterwards into liberty and peace. When such persons describe their earliest religious recollections, we perceive, by contrast, what reason we have to bless God for the presiding influence of a different order of religious thought and a different spirit of devotion over our own happy childhood. When they tell us of the confused religious ideas propounded to their young minds as

* See the "Declaration of Faith, Church Order and Discipline of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters, as adopted at the Third General Meeting of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, held at the Congregational Library, London, May 7, 8 and 10, 1833." Jackson and Walford. Price One Penny.

absolute and sacred truths,—of their natural doubts being abruptly awed into silence,—of their intelligent questions rebuked as shocking,—of things seemingly impossible and contradictory urged as saving doctrines,—of their being deliberately untaught their natural notion of sin as coinciding with their consciousness of occasional wrong-doing as children, and being required to call themselves wicked in a different sense and degree from what they really felt and believed themselves to be so,—and of their being untaught their natural love of the beauty of the world, and their natural sense of the blessedness of life and the goodness of God, to accept instead the thought of a ruined world and an angry Deity, as the preparation for a convulsive welcome to the saving truths of the gospel,—we may, by contrast, understand the blessedness of our own childhood, and the holy duty of keeping that of our own dear children sacred from such profanation of its innocent sincerity, such degradation of its clear intellect, such torture of its pure and bright feelings, such an incubus upon its whole elasticity. And if we look back upon our own growing years of earnest thought and deep feeling, when the great problems of the world and of human life opened fast before us,—at first as intensely interesting speculations for our systematic philosophy, and by and by, and one by one, as the actual problems given for our deeper personal solution in doing, bearing, feeling, loving, believing and trusting,—we may know, by comparing our experience with that of some around us, the value of this freedom of spirit, this fearlessness of intellect and this wholeness of heart in the pursuit of truth and the welcoming of progressive convic-

tions. What misery can be greater to a conscientious and sensitive mind, than to feel itself torn by conflicting truths, and not to enjoy the higher conviction that all truths must harmonize at length, whencesoever derived! What mental perversion so sad and full of suffering, as to have thoughts of moral obligation attached, not to the diligent pursuit of truth (which is man's to fulfil), but to its absolute attainment (which is God's to grant and to decide)! How inexpressibly sad for the devout Christian to have attached his feelings of love and veneration to some ideas not essential to Christianity, and which his pursuit of scientific or secular knowledge is sure to confront! If he keeps his faith, it will probably be at the sacrifice of his intelligence.

Yet what other class of Christians besides ourselves, really and thoroughly holding the avowed principles of their sect, can contentedly suffer the heavens to tell their own story, without protest ever and anon against some new discovery or speculation as not sound in theology?—or the earth to unfold its stone-leaved volume deeper and deeper down, without some religious scruple about reading or accepting the records of too remote an antiquity? Who else can venture upon moral science,—the science of man himself, his faculties, obligations, hopes,—without feeling his system of Christian theology silently remonstrating with him at every step? Who else can, in the name of his religious belief, and at its express dictate and with its active help, look upon human life so cheerfully and hopefully as he to whom Nature and Revelation speak of the same divine attributes in their common God, and the same purposes as their joint tendency? What

other class are fearlessly, devoutly rather, addicted to the study of natural science and secular knowledge, to literature and the fine arts, to social and political improvements, and to the promotion of education without stint or sectarian stipulation? Who else can feel that his whole manly nature is cherished and encouraged by his religion, none of its powers trifled with, none of its faculties tantalized; but that what is wrought in him by studying the marvels and the mysteries of the natural world, and passing through the experiences (so they be not sinful) of human life, is in strict harmony with his growth to a yet more perfect manhood in Christ? Proudly, yet sadly, we ask, What other religionists can feel thus?

None else can feel it in the name of their religious systems, though possibly some may in spite of them. Some may quietly accept the volume of Nature as from God, without actively renouncing their traditionary belief in that of Revelation; but such persons usually avoid bringing the two face to face. They dare not risk the comparison. They are distressed when for a while it forces itself upon them. In fact, the religious elements of their own minds, as believed to be derived from the two sources respectively, do not harmonize. Meanwhile, the larger number of professionally scientific men are found ever cautiously avoiding all allusions to Christian theology. Probably the majority of them are, as reputed, sceptical of revealed religion. This melancholy result must lie at the door of those who have weakly renounced their Christian franchise. And while the contemplation of it may make us sad indeed for the wounded honour of Christianity and

the stunted developement of so many minds of highest order, our own conscious maintenance of that spiritual freedom in which all truth is seen to be harmonious, and the very pursuit of truth felt to be blessed and believed to be virtuous, is a proper source of rejoicing and encouragement to us amid the many difficulties and disheartenings which confessedly try our religious zeal and steadfastness.

An occasion like this seems to me especially suitable for mutual encouragement, rather than for the indulgence of disappointed or desponding feelings. Always let us endeavour to see our position as a religious body in its true light, dissembling none of the difficulties that beset us, nor the faults that may be chargeable upon us; but let us especially invoke the light of our conscious blessings and advantages, to point the path of our responsibilities and duties, and with them to cheer our reasonable hopes.

In no spirit of boasting, then, but impressed with it as a blessed and solemnly important fact, I remind you of the great characteristic of our religious body. That characteristic is freedom, spiritual freedom,—Christian manhood, Christian citizenship. The world, both religious and secular, knows it, and (the latter especially) in various ways attests it. The fact is patent to all, in our masculine theology, and the cheerful, trustful tone of our public worship; in our joint reverence for natural religion and revealed; in our undisguised love of natural science, literature and art, as things really from God for good; and not least in the style of our citizenship and social demeanour, in which, while we seldom move as a mass of Unitarians, *quasi* Unitarians, we always do move when any practical work of human

improvement is to be attempted, and with as much unanimity of action as is compatible with the sovereign freedom of the individual soul.

Now call to mind with me, Christian brethren, to what specialties of our religious history and principles it is that we owe this special religious freedom.

The freedom of our churches (and therein of our consciences) from that State control which strangely confounds the authority of Cæsar and of God, we but share with all other bodies of Nonconformists. So far, we are all on the high level of spiritual religion. But, as regards the internal constitution and government of our churches, we differ more or less from other Dissenting bodies, by the almost intire absence among us of those modes of control or interference which are generally exercised by the officers of Dissenting churches over the professed belief and the outward demeanour, if not even the secular affairs, of their members. While most of them recognize a *church* of members bound by stricter discipline, as the selecter part of the *congregation* which is attached by a more vague and general sympathy of worship and co-operation, with us the church and the congregation are commonly identical, and their basis is the wider, less organized and less disciplined union which elsewhere constitutes the congregation as distinguished from the church. Now, if this be an error (as many among us think it is to a certain extent), it is at least an error on the side of individual freedom. Every one among us is a *monad*, an individual personal agent; not a wheel in a machine, not even a soldier under orders. No one parts with his individual freedom

or responsibility, in attaching himself to our body. Perhaps we want something more of organization. In many of our societies we do want it, to the extent even of the common business arrangements which all such societies involve, and in which, if the members generally were led to take an active interest by being admitted to share in the secular management, an increased zeal and a warmer feeling of religious fellowship might in such cases ensue. The administration of our societies varies, indeed, in these respects. Some are intirely representative, if not democratic, in their constitution and management. In the administration of others, there is no popular element such as the spirit of the present day demands. But whatever plans of further organization may in any cases be recommended to our acceptance, should be simply such as correspond to those which we adopt in our various other associations for mutual help, contemplating merely the increase of our collective strength for good objects, without endangering that individuality of character and action which so eminently befits the free-born.

But our religious freedom is mainly due to our intire practical renunciation of that specific idea or feeling, which forms at once the sting and the self-torture of what is called Orthodoxy. We are spiritually free, because we have risen above the wretched dogma of merit as attaching, or salvation (without merit) as accruing, to particular opinions rather than to other opinions held with equal sincerity and adorned with like virtues. Practically, if not theoretically too, as taught by the conduct of our Presbyterian forefathers, if not also convinced by our own reflections, we understand the springs

of opinion in the human mind too well to think ourselves in a safer spiritual state than conscientious Trinitarians. Our distinctive theology includes not religious opinions only, but more prominently the *philosophy of opinions.* It goes far deeper than to the mere adoption of a belief in the Divine Unity as opposed to a belief in a Divine Trinity. If to this our belief, with its attendant doctrines, we devoutly added (as why should we not?—let the Trinitarian reflect and answer) the anathema that "unless a man keep it whole and undefiled, he shall without doubt perish everlastingly," Unitarianism, instead of being freedom and blessing, would be the withering thing that Athanasian Trinitarianism now is. And if the doctrine of the Trinity and its logically connected views were simply taught as intellectually true, without the arrogant instilment of a feeling or opinion that there is spiritual safety in holding them and spiritual danger in denying them, in that case Trinitarian nonconformity would be as worthy of the free-born Christian who believed it as Unitarianism. For my part, I know not why Trinitarianism might not be thus propounded; but the simple fact is, that it never is so represented, unless in occasional whispers which the Trinitarian world immediately hushes. The Trinitarian belief uniformly is (in all its authorized formularies, its preaching and its discussions) connected with more or less of this *moral intimidation;*—Unitarianism never is in any degree. And the real source of our freedom of heart-faith is not simply our Unitarian opinions, but our deeper conviction as to the real nature and value, the influence and the merits, of opinions, and of the processes by which they are

formed and the spirit in which they are held. So, on the other hand, that which, in Orthodoxy, moves our moral disapprobation, is not, and never can be, the belief in a Trinity, as an opinion conscientiously held by any; but that poor yet arrogant notion, however conscientiously* held, that that belief can earn a man Heaven's favour, or its want peril another man's salvation. By Orthodoxy we understand, not Trinitarianism nor any *ism* in itself, but any *ism* that arms itself with *spiritual pains and penalties*. From all such fears in our own souls we are free. We are free from the sin or the sorrow (whichever it might be) of threatening or condemning others; and from the sore anguish of doubting whether the good, the pure, the upright, the intelligent and sincere among our fellow-men and fellow-christians, can be saved as well as we by the mercies of the Father of us all! We are spared the moral perplexity, the confusion and the misery of doubting whether the same things which are right on earth are so in heaven, and whether conscience, which is at any rate our best guide, be really a light from God, or a glare of temptation to make us sin against the faith!

Alas that it should be the characteristic mark of one small denomination only in the Christian world, to be free from the suffering and the perpetration of

* I say, though *conscientiously* held. Imagine a man *conscientiously* appropriating another's purse, as this man does his salvation; or *conscientiously* obstructing another's vote, as this man does his spiritual franchise. An English jury would not believe in such conscientiousness. Why do we respect it, then, in the church of Christ? *Ita suo utatur ne alienum lædat*, is as good a rule of mutual right in spiritual as in temporal matters.

spiritual terrors like these! But it is right, nay it is necessary, to recall these things to mind as matters of simple but expressive fact, when some even among ourselves seem to forget, or are disposed to disparage them, and when a demand is raised for *Free Churches* as something hitherto quite unknown to Christendom.

The Christian worth and promise of this demand altogether depends upon the *quarter from which it may arise.*

Does it arise among those who are at present constrained by articles and church government, and yet more by that tyrannous prestige of Orthodoxy? Do Independent and Baptist churches and colleges begin to modify their articles, relax their confessions, draw their new deeds in the open style of the old Presbyterian trusts, and ordain young ministers on their profession of a Christian, rather than a Trinitarian, belief? All this is good. All this bespeaks progressive liberty. Do some of the members of churches of this order find themselves in a more active state of opinionative progress than the generality of the society, and resolve to form themselves into a new organization for the sake of yet greater freedom to themselves and less immediate collision with old friends and fellow-worshipers? It befits them to form a Free Church and to call it so. They thus shew themselves freed-men of Christ, for whom they are willing to suffer loss; and they trust their new church shall welcome to its baptismal font many generations of the free-born.

But when I hear this demand for a Free Church uttered by free-born Unitarians, with wonder unfeigned I ask myself, Can such persons really know

what they mean? I see and feel many wants indeed in our churches as they are; but freedom is perhaps the only one not among the number. I can imagine many a devout sigh for more abundance of the spiritual food of the gospel, in certain cases in which the necessities of doctrinal and controversial self-defence have too long prevailed, especially if such necessities have hardened and depraved the taste of the minister himself to a love of technical preaching for its own sake. I can understand how a variety of opinion, feeling and taste may prevail (in our churches or any others) upon details in the mode of conducting public worship, — the use of a liturgy, the adaptation of music, and many other suggestions,—by which some may think its vitality might be increased. I can well appreciate the desire that our places of worship could be warmed, as it were, by numbers like those of the more popular sects; and I would join in the longing, urgent intreaty to my Unitarian brethren to be, because they are few in numbers, all the more zealous, beyond the proportion of their numbers, especially in their attendance upon the offices of social prayer and praise. But if you ask for more *freedom*,—that is the one thing that you ask absurdly, for this very reason,—that *you have perfect freedom already.*

Make the round of all other denominations with me, and let us see what any of them can offer you different from what you have in the Unitarian chapel. I will suppose the ordinary style of Unitarian worship; the customary Dissenting form of service, with the minister's written prayer (intermediate between the liturgical and the extempore

methods, and avoiding the evils of each, if not securing the advantages of either); plain, simple psalm-singing; reverent reading and intelligent and devout exposition of the Scriptures; preaching rational and practical at any rate, whatever it may have or may want of eloquence or unction to particular tastes. What, then, shall we find elsewhere?

If you enter the walls of the Established Church, you shall find perhaps a fine choir and possibly intoned prayers. Doxologies unscriptural and to you untrue, you are sure to find. You ought to find a sermon consistent with the Thirty-nine Articles, and on certain days to hear yourself consigned to everlasting perdition for your Unitarianism. Such would be your freedom there! Pursue your search to the Independent or Baptist meeting-house. If you live in a large town, there are many such places, and there are ministers of very different orders of mind and education and of very various theological views. I suppose you will probably seek what you want, under the ministry of one of their younger men who have enjoyed the richer educational advantages lately opened to students in those bodies. Perhaps his orthodoxy is moderate, his preaching mainly rational, while practical and Christian. You can join in his services with but little mental reserve. In fact, the more like simple Unitarianism his services are, the better you are pleased with him. What is personal to him—voice, style, manner—possibly you may prefer to those of your own minister. Will you settle down then under his ministry? Very well. You have freedom to do that. No one will call you to account. You will not be excommunicated or read out of the society by your old friends. They

are too liberal for that. You join your new friends. And what more liberty have you gained than you had before? The liberty—of somewhat more mental reserve, just in proportion as your new minister is true to his avowed doctrinal position, and the certainty of hearing him canvassed painfully by his orthodox hearers, just in proportion as he becomes satisfactory to such as you. Will you take one step further, and become a member of his *church* as well as congregation? You will not call that an increase of your freedom, I hope, at any rate,—to submit yourself to a theological and experiential examination at the hands of your fellow-men, and receive permission from the minister and deacons to remember Jesus Christ in his beautiful ordinance, no longer as a matter of affection on your part towards your Master, but as a sign of your agreement in doctrine and church-membership with the people called Independents or the people called Baptists! You must go elsewhere for additional freedom, my friend; and the further you go hence, the less of it you will find, unless, among the Society of Friends, you can be satisfied with the freedom of your own thoughts in silence. Among the Methodists you may find excitement; among the Catholics, sweet incense and rich music often, and Latin prayers, and spiritual absolutism. But freedom is what you say you are in search of; and in search of that you would leave the free-born of all Christendom. Say plainly you are in search of music,—say you love ceremony,—say you crave excitement,—say you desire mysticism,—say you test truth and duty by numbers,—or say (if that be true) that you intelligently worship a Trinity in the Godhead; and then make your choice,

among all the Trinitarian sects, of that which you most approve. Only do not say freedom is what you are in search of, or we shall fear you do not know what freedom is.

In fact, none of these existing organizations, it is manifest, have the thorough sympathy of those who are in search of what they call freedom. Some of them propose, therefore, to form a new cluster of societies, which they will call the "Free Church," or the "Unsectarian Church," or perhaps "The Church of the Future,"—for all these names have found favour.

I respectfully ask, in what respects could any such church be more free than the Unitarian church which they would leave? Or what freedom can it enjoy except in marked imitation of ours?

To be unsectarian (if that is the distinction aimed at in founding one sect more), the first requisite of all is, that you throw off, manfully and openly, every remnant of the idea of salvation by orthodoxy; that you disown, not passively, but actively, those flimsy but cruel trammels upon outspeaking sincerity, which constitute the only real sectarianism that the world has to complain of. Rid us of these, and you will indeed do something for truth and sincerity. Assert, and illustrate in your own persons, the necessity of every man's having an opinion and avowing it. But if you do not plainly disown that cruel and demoralizing notion of salvable opinions,—if you desire to be unsectarian without exercising your own right to the free avowal of your opinions, and without distinctly abjuring that dogma which is the very root of all sectarian bitterness,—I beseech you, ask yourselves whether you are quite free from the

unworthy fear of what the orthodox or semi-orthodox world may think and say of you. Think not to steal a march upon the unsuspectingness of their Christian liberality, by keeping back or mystifying your obnoxious Unitarian opinions. If you actively protest against the notion of spiritual safety in one opinion and spiritual peril in another, you will suffer all the odium of heresy; and, under whatever minor shade of opinion, you will be regarded as being (what I suppose you do not deny that you really are) a Unitarian, who does not set a high value upon his Unitarianism. But if you are not prepared to lay vigorous siege to this, the inmost fortress of orthodoxy, before which the intellect of Christendom still trembles and its conscience every hour sophisticates, tell us not, at least, that you are too free-spirited to remain among us. Our freedom has given us a bravery above dissembling.

Let me also pointedly ask, whether it is for the sake of our congregations, or of our ministers, that a larger freedom is demanded than has hitherto been found among us?

Do our laymen feel themselves fettered? Are they priest-ridden, or creed-bound, or church-enslaved? They smile at the supposition which seems to insinuate such a possibility. Some bond of religious sentiment or opinion they know there must be, tacitly or expressly recognized, in order to constitute a worshiping society at all. With us, this is not the bond of stereotyped articles and dead forms, but the living sympathy of a general, though by no means minute, agreement in religious idea and feeling; that basis changing from time to time with the progress of knowledge and opinion, and, in part

perhaps, even with the change of taste. It is this preference given to a living bond of feeling over the written one of creeds and forms, that gives their practical liberty and power of self-adaptation to our churches, admitting the greatest practicable variety of religious views and tastes contemporaneously among our members, with the fewest repellent points in our worship to offend either the practical and devout Christian of orthodox impressions, but free heart and mind, or the devout disciple of merely natural religion, who feels our Christian worship to be nutritive of the faith which he thinks he has gained from the Creator's works alone. I see not how any broader basis of Christian worship is attainable. All the rest of Christendom think ours is too broad already.

Or is it our Ministers who sigh for a larger freedom? For freedom of theological thought? Freedom of ministerial function? Or freedom of general action? What can they want, in any of these respects, that they have not? Who so free as we? I speak as a minister when I say, I feel the great responsibility of my public life to arise out of this grand but awful freedom of thought and action with which I am intrusted,—a freedom so large and generous, that it behoves me to beware lest, in its name, I infringe the co-ordinate but not equally inviolable freedom which belongs to my congregation. To me, in my public functions as their minister, they have given the *active* liberty of speech, confiding to my sole discretion and taste the guidance of their social worship, as well as the matter and manner of exhortation and instruction. To themselves, they have but reserved the *passive* liberty

of mental dissent from things addressed to them or spoken in their name, with the power (how seldom exercised!) of protest or disclaimer if I should do anything wayward, rash or crotchety, in the honourable and confidential position in which they have placed me. I do feel it as a most sacred responsibility, that while such intire individuality of action is intrusted to me, my poor sayings and doings are still, in some sort naturally and necessarily, taken to be representative of the faith, worship, morals, taste and discretion of the Unitarian society to which I minister, and the body to which I belong. If, when I was a young man, still learning life's common experience, I ever did a hasty and impetuous, yet true-hearted and earnest thing, I may have had reason to bless the constitution of our churches for the non-interference of an officious and vulgar board of deacons, and to thank the forbearing generosity of a friendly elder (in the unofficial sense of life's true eldership), who could gently hint a caution without marring confidence. And when, in mature life, I have found myself interested, as a true Christian man, in one social, moral, political or benevolent question after another, in each of which perhaps my congregational friends may have more or less sympathized with me (yet not all of them equally and intirely), and upon some one or other of which, if I have chosen to devote myself with a somewhat exclusive zeal to its advocacy, I have in that degree left behind me the general sympathy of those who may perhaps in turn have found their benevolent crotchets somewhere else,—ought I not to feel religiously bound, by my respect for the equal freedom of all my fellow-worshipers, to take particular care

lest the freedom of the pulpit should, in my hands, invade that of the pew, by my making myself, as it were, their representative against themselves? You may have known congregations sorely tried by exaggerated and predominant, if not exclusive, ideas in the heads of some excellent ministers. You may have known others bearing even with grave violations of religious taste and propriety. Yet with what patience have such things usually been borne! Nor, till the house of Christian worship was becoming a literary lecture-room, or a political meeting-place, or an institute of natural religion and philosophy, or was beckoning back the exorcised spirit of creeds and terrorism, have our generous laity risen in grave protest against the abused liberty of the pulpit.

Such is that vast and most responsible freedom committed to our hands as Unitarian ministers. We need not desire a more generous trust. But we ought, indeed, to feel tenderly anxious to preserve it from abuse. We ought to hold and exercise it in full sympathy with the equal liberty of our congregations. Our Presbyterian forefathers in this ministry, in more difficult times than ours, and through their great tenderness on this subject, sometimes earned the reproach of being formal in professional demeanour, and timid as regards many claims of social and political usefulness. Let us beware at least of a boldness that should defy propriety, an individuality that should be mere singularity, and a renunciation of long revered forms without the possibility of inspiring, in those who cling to them, a higher reverence than we supplant.

But I must, indeed, hasten to conclude this long

address on this copious subject, by pointedly and briefly suggesting some of the special duties which seem to devolve upon the Church of the Free-born.

We are a small body; but we have an influence, direct and indirect, upon the religion and morals of society, immensely great in proportion to our numbers. And I believe we may exercise a yet stronger influence; and, if we can, we ought to do. Other churches are fast becoming leavened with our principles. And this very fact is naturally producing a spirit of reserve and caution in their members, which it is very unworthy of us to imitate, though it may be somewhat tempting to our love of peace and union to do so. *They* are feeling and groping for a new theological position. *We* have long since found ours, in the truer philosophy of opinions and the true blessedness of having opinions of our own. We have but to use this noble position conscientiously and diligently. It is not for us to take refuge in vague generalities of opinion or sentiment, such as may possibly befit a state of mere transition from spiritual bondage into freedom.

I. Our first duty as free-born Christians clearly is, to sustain with ever-increasing liberality and zeal, a pure, comprehensive and spiritual example of Public Worship. And this, not for the sake of ourselves and our families alone. We might do so much in a very quiet and retiring way. If to acquit ourselves of our personal convictions were all, we might do as some before us were wisely content to do in very different circumstances, who chose the sites of their chapels in by-ways and alleys remote from public notice, and were satisfied and thankful so long as the officers of State persecution did not

break in upon their acts of worship. But in this day, when our freedom is no longer infringed by the State, and when the conspicuous exercise of it is more and more needed to diffuse salt among the religious world and anything of vital faith among the secular world,—the correlative testimony on our part requires something more of urgency and (so to speak) aggressiveness of action. We must endeavour to bring our religious views and our places of religious worship within the notice of those many who, in all classes of society, are in want of something more true to their intellectual and moral discernment than reaches them from elsewhere; the thoughtful and reading among cultivated minds, whose spiritual solitude is dreary indeed till they find some like-minded with themselves. Nor less must we strive to minister to the religious wants of those rough and fearless thinkers among the less cultivated classes, who exhibit the mixed excellences and defects of self-education and half-education, easily and confidently rejecting their own once venerated traditions, and often as confidently accepting the most crude and unascertained theories and fancies of the hour,—to reject them, perhaps, in turn. There is nothing in the religious world that can meet their needs, if our faith cannot.

The same publicity and prominence needs to be given to our religious agencies in mere self-defence also, against the ever-repeated calumnies of ignorance and bigotry; and for the credit of our common Christianity likewise, which is ever most seriously perilled by its popular advocates.

For all these reasons, it is our duty to assert for ourselves an increasing prominence in the religious

and secular world; to increase, in every practicable way that a pure taste allows, the attractiveness of our churches and modes of worship; to come out of our hiding-places, where we still remain unnoticed and unknown in alleys and back streets; to rebuild many more of our venerable but gloomy and almost ruined fanes; and somewhat proudly to hold up our heads as conscious sons of the free-born through many generations past.

II. Another great office given to us to perform is, to reconcile Religion and Human Life. High Orthodoxy has long been setting them at variance; and, as the very natural result, a low, grovelling Secularism now declares openly that this world, in which we must live and labour, wants not, nor cares for, Religion. One of the great practical religious problems of our day is, to rekindle the lamp of faith where it has been thus extinguished. Orthodox Christians are no match for the short-sighted but hard-headed logic of the "Secularist." Some few have ventured in the encounter, and been signally worsted. Wherever we have met this order of thought, we have commanded respect at any rate, as we have also shewn it towards all fair argument. And if religion is ever to revive upon the dreary wastes thus given up by orthodoxy to low worldliness, it can only be the religion of the free-born. Here, then, is a noble and mighty task apparently intrusted to us. We had need multiply our agencies and increase our efforts in all directions, to make it known and felt how religion has the best promise, in the true use, of the life that now is, as the foundation of its promise for that which is to come.

III. A third function that seems especially to devolve upon us is, the diffusion of sound Biblical Knowledge. Among all the popular cheap literature of the present day, how little is there that contributes to a rational understanding and vigorous reception of the Scriptures of divine truth! Books that are to sell must be written to order. A great publisher dares not undertake anything that is not, ostensibly at least, orthodox. And what a reproach to the intellect of Christendom are that most popular class of books (printed by tens of thousands) which even now trace the Czar of Russia in "Gog of the land of Magog," and profess to read the politics and fates of modern Europe in the books of declining Judaism and opening Christianity, already confidently interpreted as prophecies of modern politics on twenty different occasions, and each time acknowledged to remain still unfulfilled!

Our day has indeed produced a very superior order of books in illustration of the Scriptures, which form a strong contrast to the last mentioned, and solicit a more intelligent class of readers. I mean those books of which the Pictorial Bible is the type. These have the great merit of conveying real knowledge, and conveying it well, in illustration of sacred subjects, *so far as they go.* But, still in evident deference to the shadowy orthodoxy of the reading public and its publishers, they either omit or dissemble all those central questions of religious evidence and religious belief, on the solution of which the real reception and appreciation of the Scriptures depend. This spirit of compromise is greatly to be regretted, and leaves undiminished the necessity of such labours as free-born Christians alone can and

will put forth for the illustration of the real claims and real evidences of the Scriptures. This Society, whose anniversary we hold this day, has collectively done much, and many honoured names in our communion have done much, both individually and in connection with it, for the illustration of the New Testament, and in part the Old also, from the true philosophical and literary point of view. And assuredly there is a wide field still open for such exertions, in the re-translation and exposition of the Old Testament, more particularly, for popular use.

IV. One other great service the Church of the Free-born may, I believe, render to our country just now, by exhibiting the practical solution of the great *Educational difficulty*, as now paraded and exaggerated in the strange debate about secular and religious day-schools. I can but hint the nature of the service to be done by us here. The alleged necessity of religious instruction in day-schools for the poor (by which is virtually meant *sectarian* instruction, for the argument will not otherwise run), is, you know, urged as a fatal objection to all State assistance. And most blindly has that necessity been in words admitted by the Government, who have entrapped themselves in the double use of that word *religious*. Evidently the same principle (if true) would equally shew the impossibility of any collective instruction for children beyond the limits of one sect in any one day-school.

Now this seemingly invincible difficulty has been solved generations ago among our denomination, who never seem, indeed, to have acknowledged the difficulty. It has been solved in our schools for the upper and middle classes, for whom our ministers

(until the late introduction of Proprietary and other similar schools) have ever been the most numerous and successful teachers to children of all denominations, on the express understanding of a joint secular system and good moral influences,—special religious teaching being reserved for other times and places. We *have* done the impossible thing. We *have* separated the secular instruction of our day-schools, not from that truly religious and moral watchfulness over young actions and habits which is all-important, whether in the school-room or the play-ground, but from those doctrinal inculcations of religion which were not suitable for all alike, and which were deemed rather the province of the home and of the church, with its institutions for catechetical or other directly scriptural teaching. And why the same thing which is right for our own children in the comfortable classes of society, is not right for those whom we patronize or help as being poor, it is difficult to learn.

The same thing, substantially, was done by Joseph Lancaster, and by the Borough-Road School for many years, by an unsectarian use of selections from the Scriptures, until the newer orthodox zeal of that Society forgot its pledged faith and dared to "speak wickedly for God."

But plainly the thing *can* be done. And I venture to say it *is* done in most, if not all, such day schools as are connected with our places of worship, or under the government of our members. They *are* places of collective secular instruction and moral, and even devotional, education and discipline, in which children of all the various religious denominations *do* beneficially meet, while those religious

differences which are incompatible with a collective education, are rightly and most religiously left to the home, the church or chapel, and the vestry-class or the Sunday-school, as their proper agencies.

Let us then continue to hold up to the world's view this visible solution of a needless yet pressing difficulty. Let us recall the attention of our Statesmen and of our *Voluntaries* (to use their own new term for this new and somewhat wilful scruple) to these great facts. Statesmen and Voluntaries, agreeing to allow the needless introduction of debated religious questions into the day-school, agree in nothing else. But the former insist upon pursuing the idea of State education under these self-imposed difficulties, and the latter exult over the argumentative admission by their opponents, that State education, and all collective education whatever, must be set aside, and that English grammar, arithmetic, geography, and all other branches of school learning, must be communicated to young Methodists as Methodists, to young Calvinists as Calvinists, to Baptists as Baptists, and all the rest with similar exclusiveness.

O happy the free-born, who know better how to pursue a collective plan of secular learning in kindly fellowship with companions of all the various sects of religion, and shew their respect for the distinctive religious views of all parties by simply recognizing a proper time and place for everything that is done under the sun! This same principle, applied to the great world of our mature life, is full of corresponding good fruits in the collective action of mankind for common purposes and sympathies, and their friendly divergence where principle or

taste or feeling decidedly diverges. So let us apply it; and, as much as lieth in us, live peaceably with all men. So let us vindicate at once the earthly and the heavenly citizenship, to both of which we are free-born, as subjects of this happy realm of Britain and of the wider kingdom of Christ on earth and in heaven.

And to God most great, most good, our Heavenly Father, whose we are and whom we serve, let us give the praise of grateful and obedient lives. Amen.

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